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Game Changers & Scene Makers: Black & Brown Women of the Punk Underground

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Game Changers & Scene Makers:
Black & Brown Women of the Punk Underground
Courtney Aucone
Thesis Seminar
Dr. Mary Dillard
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Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements.....	1
Introduction.....	2
❖ A Note on Methodology.....	21
Chapter I: “A Wave of History”	26
Chapter II: The Underground.....	51
Chapter III: “Somos Chulas, No Somos Pendejas”: Negotiating Femininity & Power in the Underground.....	70
Conclusion.....	91
Appendix i: Song Lyrics.....	96
Appendix ii: Zine Covers & Artists.....	117
Bibliography.....	126

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INTRODUCTION:

I have had a life-long love affair with music. I feel loyalty to it. My commitment to the sounds that sustained me increases with time. My mother raised me on the mostly passive and tame voices of the women musicians she and her mother have enjoyed from Milly Quezada¹ to Sarah McLachlan². Discovering the aggression and boldness of punk was a total revelation to me, teaching me things about self-confidence and femininity that influenced the woman I became. As a young Brown/Dominican/Italian woman navigating rigid gender roles that left little room for individuality and variation, punk provided the free pass my pre-teen self had been waiting for, allowing me to transcend the restrictions that silenced my voice and suppressed the very qualities that made me human: my anger and need to be heard.

My personal relationship to the music is the motivation behind choosing to pen a history of Black and Brown women in punk. Through my research and the oral histories that I have collected I am hoping to argue the forces, both emotional and societal, that inspire Black and Brown women today to become involved in the underground music scenes of Providence, RI, New York City, and to a lesser extent,

¹Milly Quezada, my Abuela's favorite merengue artist, sings of love and heartbreak. Released on her album *Vive* in 1998, "Para Darte Mi Vida" was a commercial success, peaking at number 5 on Billboard's Latin Pop Airplay chart and number 4 on the Hot Latin Tracks chart, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin/7540986/elvis-crespo-top-10-hot-latin-songs-poll>. While "Para Darte Mi Vida" is technically Quezada's track featuring Elvis Crespo, I had to visit Crespo's profile page on Billboard's website to find detailed information and statistics on the song itself. Considering that the song was a commercial success, it is curious that Billboard's artist profile of Quezada would omit a major marker of her success such as this. See appendix i for song lyrics.

² My mother played Sarah McLachlan around the house when I was growing up. Like Quezada, much of McLachlan's music is about love and heartbreak. "Ice Cream" happens to be mom's karaoke song. See appendix i of this thesis for song lyrics.

Toronto Ontario.³ I consider the ways these two things interact and manifest within the scene while also discussing the ways that Black and Brown women have impacted their local punk scenes from 2000-present day. I will do this in relation to their influence on how the scene developed and changed turning it into what it is today. In this thesis I explore the ways Black and Brown women navigate the underground on an individual level as they encounter sexism, economic oppression, and racism in the real world and in the smaller worlds of the music scenes that function as a second home to the youths who created them.⁴ My oral histories serve to highlight the ways Black and Brown women have been ignored in the music scholarship. Ignoring these women contributes to our erasure from the written history of Black and Brown women in punk.⁵

The scholarship of punk is scarce. Much of the scholarship to date fails to note the ways that women of color experience the same social isolation as white women punks or others but in ways unique to their experiences as people who encounter both sexism and racism at the same time. Scholars and writers of women's music history effectively address gender discrimination but fail to offer an analysis of race as it applies to the Black/Brown musicians they write about in their work. This serves as an injustice to these women because it lowers the bar for the way in which we write their stories and in turn lessens the quality of what we as

³ Time limitations kept me from using this oral history in the thesis as much as I would have liked to.

⁴ Stephen Duncombe describes the scene as "the loose consideration of self-consciously 'alternative' publications, bands, shows, radio stations, cafes, bookstores, and people that make up modern bohemia." Stephen Duncombe, "Let's All Be Alienated Together: Zines and the Making of Underground Community," In *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by Joe Alan Austin and Michael Willard, 427-51, NY: NYU Press, 1998.

Underground music scenes serve as a safe haven for folks who may not have anywhere else to go. They are the details of Milly Quezada's album and her experience of homelessness or are stuck in

historians and music fans learn/read about their legacies. Further, and most importantly, it erases their Blackness from the greater punk rock narrative. This is a discrepancy that my thesis aims to correct by setting race at the forefront. I explore the ways in which Black and Brown women use the scene as a platform to address and enact their personal politics, serving as a creative backdrop for subverting stereotypes and gender norms. I will consider how doing so allows us to engage with our rage and anger in a safe and healthy way, a political act in itself.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Sources pertaining to Black and Brown women in the underground, both primary and secondary generally follow one of three themes: The author may overtly address the potential implications of sexism, race, or being self-identified femme within the punk scene and structure their arguments around these intersecting identities.⁶ Other authors choose to touch on these subjects briefly, quickly moving on to focus more on the music itself and the subculture that thrived years ago.⁷ The third approach omits the contributions and influence of women

⁶ See: Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004.

David A. Ensminger, *Visual Vitriol: the Street Art and Subcultures of the Punk and Hardcore Generation*. Chapters 6-9, Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2011.

Laura Way, "Playing A-Minor in the Punk Scene? Exploring the Articulation of Identity by Older Women Punks" In *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance*, edited by The Subcultures Network, 65-76, Manchester University Press, 2014.

Hilary Pilkington, "'If You Want to Live, You Better Know How to Fight': Fighting Masculinity in the Russian Punk Scene" In *Ibid.*, edited by The Subcultures Network, 13-33, Manchester University Press, 2014.

⁷ See: Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, UMI Research Press, 1989, 67, 71, 111.

Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground, 1981-1991*, London: Little, Brown, 2002.

Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, Print.

altogether, especially women of color, which suggests that these writers of music history and popular culture are not concerned with seeking those women out and writing them into the broader historical narrative.⁸ This last approach is a clear example of sexism at work, as they should be conscious of their influence, power, and obligation to their discipline as the writer's of history. It is especially dangerous because leaving Black and Brown women out gives folks, particularly newer fans still learning the history and coming into the music and culture the false impression that women have made fewer the contributions to the music. This lack of representation in the scholarship feeds into the racist notion that Black and Brown folks don't make, listen to, or enjoy punk music in spite of the fact that rock 'n' roll and thus punk are derived of Black music forms.

In addition, the majority of the written history of punk is lay history, written primarily by avid fans, music journalists, musicologists, ethnomusicologists,

⁸ See: Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, UMI Research Press, 1989.

Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*, London: Ashgate Press, 2007.

Paul Hegarty. *Noise/Music: A History*, New York: Continuum, 2007, 96-99.

In this book about the history of noise/music including punk, women punks are mentioned just once. Hegarty argues that lack of technical skill is associated with femininity and sophisticated musicianship with masculinity. The analysis spans two paragraphs at the end of the sixth chapter, *Inept*. He criticizes the aforementioned notion of femininity having a relationship to musical skill, notions rooted in sexism and misogyny. He does all of this to help him better describe the music. He does not make any distinct or overt assessments about the women who experienced this themselves. He mentions punk rocker and style icon Siouxsie Sioux, famous for her contribution to the U.K. post-punk scene circa 1977, once on page 96 for a single contribution to the punk aesthetic. For a visual of Sioux and early punk style, see appendix ii of this thesis.

Hegarty describes punk's flirtation with Nazi imagery as "Suggest[ive of] a decadence that owed more to a sexualization of Nazism rather than a Weimar decadence." Hegarty claims "Nazi imagery was a vital resource for transgressing accepted values, and would spread widely in industrial music, often to the point of unwitting caricature" (Hegarty, 96). Hegarty's analysis of Nazi imagery and evidently the subculture that adopted it excuses the behavior and donning of hate symbols, glossing over them by failing to make the historical connection of the adoption of Nazi imagery to punks of color or marginalized groups. He also fails to dissect the reasons why punks used hate symbols for their shock value.

sociologists, scholars of gender and sexuality, or the musicians themselves.⁹ The lack of music scholarship, which places race and gender at the center of analysis, is largely a reflection of the ways in which a white-dominated society in North America continues to actively ignore race and/or gender as valid points of analysis.

In my research, the works by scholars who exclude the stories of women musicians altogether were the easiest to find, as the bulk of the scholarship is male-centric. This posed a significant challenge to my research. While there is substantial scholarship available on the history of underground punk across many disciplines from anthropology to musicology, only a fraction of it centers on women affiliated with the culture and creating the music.¹⁰ Even less aims to highlight and historicize the contributions of the many Black and Brown women and girls who were not only present in the scene but pioneers, innovators and stakeholders in it as well. My efforts to find books on the history of women of color in punk turned up several

⁹ See: Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *"The Boy Looked at Johnny": The Obituary of Rock and Roll*, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987.

Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*, New York, NY: Seal Press, 1993.

Gillian Gaar is a non-fiction writer and lay historian.

Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: the Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, New York: Grove Press, 1996.

Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002.

Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004.

Katy Otto, "Challenging Sexism in the Punk Community: A Different Kind of Dude Fest" In *Off Our Backs* 34, 2004, 28-30.

Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk 1978-1984*, London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography*, New York: Routledge, 2007.

Johnny Ramone, *Commando: the Autobiography of Johnny Ramone*, New York: Abrams Image, 2012.

¹⁰ See: Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*, Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1999, Print.

Maria Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground*, Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005, Print.

biographies about white male punks¹¹ or general historical accounts of the music¹² which fail to address race and sexism as independent problems within the scene. My thesis is motivated by the fact that these kinds of sources are incomplete. I know from personal experience that there's a whole history of politics of race and gender that is being left out.

The 1980's and early 90's witnessed a spike in scholarly interest in punk following its explosion onto the underground scene and eventual break into the mainstream in 1994.¹³ Unruly punks making international headlines for causing mayhem wherever they went also undoubtedly contributed to the increase in interest about the scene. Interest then waned after the turn of the century, presumably as interest in the music itself waned, explaining why many of the secondary sources I was able to find are not current and some of the content outdated.¹⁴ I argue that this analysis deserves the same treatment that DIY, fanzines,

¹¹ Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: the Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, New York: Grove Press, 2016, Print.

¹² John Doe, *Under the Big Black Son: A Personal History of L.A. Punk*, S.I.: Da Capo Press Inc., 2017, Print.

John Doe was the bassist and sometimes vocalist of pioneering L.A. based underground punk band, X. For more on Doe, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹³ See Green Day's *Dookie*, the Offspring's *Smash*, and Bad Religion's *Stranger Than Fiction*, all released in 1994. The albums went on to become certified diamond (Green Day's *Dookie* won the Grammy award for Best Alternative Music Album the following year), multi-platinum, and gold, respectively. The success of these albums caused major labels to seek out more punk acts, thus beginning the rapid commercialization of punk music and culture.

¹⁴ Examples include: Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, UMI Research Press, 1989.

Theo Cateforis, "'Total Trash': Analysis and Post Punk Music," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 5, No. 1, 1993, 39-57.

Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock," In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, 250-74.

Stephen Duncombe, "Let's All Be Alienated Together: Zines and the Making of Underground Community," In *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by Joe Alan Austin and Michael Willard, NY: NYU Press, 1998, 427-51.

and the music itself gets in the scholarship.¹⁵ Sources that fail to engage in this kind of analysis are incomplete. An entire history of politics of race and gender is being excluded. Addressing this gap is one of the primary goals of my thesis.

To date, much of the current scholarship of women in underground music consists of condensed profiles of mainly white women with a few token Black and Brown women scattered about.¹⁶ My goal is to study these women's music, legacy and impact, where race or gender-based analyses of the culture and music itself is the focal point of the discussion. Doing so serves to foreground these underground icons who helped make punk what it is, bridging the gap that's been wedged between the old punk scene and the new, femininity and aggression, femininity and anger, race and punk music and any other "opposing identities" we've been willing into coexistence and acceptance. My hope is that my thesis will bring a social aspect to the recounting of music history that is at once exciting and intellectually stimulating by highlighting the ways that it has been whitewashed and the very presence of Black and Brown women minimized or eliminated altogether.

The Ramones were pioneers of American punk and widely considered to be the first band to truly make punk music (the music itself, not the fashion that also became a major aspect of punk identity). There is a body of scholarship that focuses

¹⁵ See: Ryan Moore and Michael Roberts, "Do-It-Yourself Mobilization: Punk and Social Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 3, 2009, 273-291.

Ian P. Moran, "Punk: The Do-It-Yourself Subculture," *Social Sciences Journal* 10, No. 1, 2011, 13.

¹⁶ See: Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*, New York, NY: Seal Press, 1993.

Maria Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground*, Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005, Print.

Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*, London: Ashgate Press, 2007.

on punk as a genre and which politicizes punk, analyzing its usefulness as an ideology and tool of political and social resistance, but little which focuses directly and solely on the Ramones's legacy and impact as the prototypical American punk band.¹⁷ There have been several biographies and autobiographies published about and by the Ramones themselves but the Ramones remain noticeably scarce as a primary point of focus within the scholarship.¹⁸ They appear most often jumbled in with the names of their contemporaries. This is because the majority of punk scholarship aims to construct either a broad history of punk music or a history of punk with a social and political analysis that is equally as broad as opposed to one which specifically focuses on the politics of gender, race, and marginalized people.

Even researchers who have chosen to overtly address racism and/or sexism in underground punk often provide limited analysis.¹⁹ A good example is *Break All*

¹⁷ See: Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!*, Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1995.

Scott Stalcup, "Noise Noise Noise: Punk Rock's History Since 1965," *Studies In Popular Culture* 23, no. 3 (April 2001): 51-64.

David Simonelli, "Anarchy, Pop and Violence: Punk Rock Subculture and the Rhetoric of Class, 1976-78," *Contemporary British History* 16, no. 2 (2002): 121-144.

Martin McLoone, "Punk Music in Northern Ireland: the Political Power of 'What Might Have Been'," *Irish Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2004): 29-38.

Jon Stratton, "Jews, Punk and the Holocaust: From the Velvet Underground to the Ramones—the Jewish-American Story," *Popular music* 24, no. 01 (2005): 79-105.

¹⁸ For auto/biographies see: Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1993.

Dee Dee Ramone and Veronica Kofman, *Lobotomy: Surviving the Ramones*, Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000.

Everett True, *Hey Ho Lets Go: The Story of The Ramones*, London: Omnibus, 2005.

Monte A. Melnick and Frank Meyer, *On the Road With the Ramones*, S. l.: Bobcat Books, 2007.

Johnny Ramone, *Commando: the Autobiography of Johnny Ramone*, New York: Abrams Image, 2012.

Marky Ramone and Richard Herschlag, *Punk Rock Blitzkrieg: My Life As a Ramone*, S.l.: Music Press Books, 2015.

¹⁹ Again see: Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*, Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

Maria Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground*, Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005, Print.

Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*. London: Ashgate

Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style by Tricia Henry, scholar of fine arts and the avant-garde.²⁰ Henry was one of the first scholars to attempt an analysis of early punk music. Her focus was on the evolution of punk aesthetics and sound in the U.K. She writes about how punk style made its way from the gritty, graffiti-decorated music venues of New York's Lower East Side to the U.K.²¹ Although she mentions skinhead punks and fascist symbols as notable components of U.K. punk style, her analysis is lacking because it fails to offer further analysis of the implications of skinhead racist culture. She writes, "The skinheads were known to be prone to violence. Their antisocial attitude sometimes took the form of racism and even, among a 'lunatic fringe,' a flirtation with right-wing fascism and Nazism."²² Henry's analysis glosses over a part of punk culture that warrants criticism. It is probable that whether merely for shock value or not, skinhead punks alienated punks of color from the scene specifically during this early period. It is also probable that there were punks of color who would brave the scene regardless of a threatening presence, simply because punk was established on a foundation of resistance and fighting the reality of there being nowhere else to go. It is easy to imagine punks of color standing their ground in the face of racism in their local scene yet scholars have omitted this aspect from the overall body of scholarship.

Press, 2007.

Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, Print.

²⁰ Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Books on Demand, 1989.

²¹ According to Henry, punk music and style found its way to the U.K. via Malcolm McLaren who opened up a clothing shop of designs inspired by the punk/street fashions he saw in New York City. He then created the Sex Pistols and became the band's first manager circa 1976, thus U.K. punk was born. Henry cites the Velvet Underground, Richard Hell, and the New York Dolls as early purveyors of punk who greatly influenced the burgeoning U.K. punk scene. For more on the Velvet Underground, Richard Hell, and the origins of punk, see chapter 1.

²² Nick Knight, *Skinhead*, London: Omnibus Press, 1982, 29 as cited in Henry, 71.

Break All Rules! breezes past skinhead culture, minimizing its white supremacist principles for an apparent focus on the music, the “fashion”, and its relationship to the local scene. It is common for punk scholars to describe the punk scene as an inclusive space for society’s rejects to find a place in the world while in the same breath noting that many punks were skinheads. Henry exposes a more negative side of the punk scene without engaging with the ways that a racist presence could have further alienated Black and Brown punks in particular. In contrast to Henry, I argue that this is a way that Black and Brown punks subvert certain aspects of punk ideology, by challenging the claim that the punk scene was a solution to the alienation that much of society’s youth was experiencing at the time.²³

Jon Savage’s *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* is widely considered to be one of the premier books to seriously undertake a recounting of the history of the punk rock subculture due to its thorough research and quality writing.²⁴ Savage is a music journalist by discipline. Just as the book’s title implies, it focuses mainly on the Sex Pistols and other male figures in the early U.K. scene such as Malcolm McLaren.²⁵ Gillian Gaar’s *She’s a Rebel: the History of Women in Rock and Roll* was one of the first publications to focus on the women of Rock music.²⁶ Unfortunately the book is a collection of short profiles of specific musicians and

²³ For more on this, refer to chapter 2 of this thesis.

²⁴ Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002.

This work was first published in 1991 under the title *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*. The updated version was published in 2002 under the title *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*.

²⁵ For more on the early U.K. punk scene, the Sex Pistols, and McLaren, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

²⁶ Gillian Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: the History of Women in Rock and Roll*, CA: Seal Press, 1992, print.

bands instead of a more substantial study. Additionally, in a book of 488 pages, Gaar only profiles two women of color over two separate chapters dedicated to punk.²⁷

Maria Raha's *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground* is another example of this.²⁸ When white women writers discuss gender and femininity in underground music scenes they often describe a dichotomy between respectable, "serious" female artists and their less respectable (read sexier) counterparts. These scholars may use certain artists as examples of what bad representation of women in music looks like in an attempt to make a case for why more women should be included in the scholarship. For example, Raha claims that, "Regardless of what bikini-addled, smiling, submissive, starved, or eager-to-please decorations are held up as talented or worthy, there are far more interesting, engaging, and inspiring women--we just have to keep making the space, and praising each other for stepping into it."²⁹ She continues,

The truth is that emotionally expansive women who frown, yell, or demand more for themselves may never gain mainstream acceptance. But there is always something deeper out there, in the art that counters popular culture's shallower tendencies. These transgressive voices will always be marginalized by lack of equal time and voice, in print, on screen, and on stage. But we just have to keep looking for them.³⁰

In this regard, the motivation behind Raha's book and the motivation behind my thesis are aligned. The primary area in which our interests diverge is in relation to her omission of an analysis of race and exposing other women artists for lacking

²⁷ Those women are artist, Yoko Ono, and legendary punk singer, Poly Styrene of the classic British punk band, X-Ray Spex.

²⁸ Maria Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground*, Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005, Print.

²⁹ Raha, 261.

³⁰ Ibid.

the depth of those women she perceives as more artistically respectable. Raha uses the words “lyrical diversity” which is striking because she acknowledges diversity as a positive in relation to women in music, mentioning Black folk/blues musician Tracy Chapman’s musical style in particular as “diverse”.³¹ Unfortunately, she fails to analyze the implications of Chapman’s racial identity. Chapman burst onto the music scene in 1988 with “the debut album”.³² She exploded in part due to the phenomenon of her being a Black artist making music rooted in Black American culture, but performing in white spaces, patronized mainly by white women. In spaces such as this, when a Black or Brown woman finds herself once again the token person of color at the function, feelings of isolation can be visceral and racism can run rampant. Raha does not acknowledge this in her analysis despite Chapman’s racial background being an important part of her identity and social consciousness.³³

Unfortunately, the 2007 publication of *The Lost Women of Rock Music* by Helen Reddington does nothing to correct Raha’s omission.³⁴ Reddington is a musician and lecturer at the University of East London and remains active in the current UK punk scene. The book features twenty-four interviews with various women involved in UK punk. Of those twenty-four subjects, only two are women of

³¹ The blues, folk, and soul music influence Chapman’s musical style.

³² A phrase commonly used to refer to her first record.

³³ For more of Chapman on Blackness and her protest music/social activist roots, see: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tracy-chapmans-black-and-white-world-75878/> <http://www.theconmag.co.za/2013/04/15/twenty-five-years-on-tracy-chapman/> And this article which delves into the socio economic struggles of Chapman’s upbringing but not her Blackness: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/sep/28/artsfeatures.popandrock>

³⁴ Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, Print.

color, Poly Styrene³⁵ and Rhoda Dakar.³⁶ The fact that they are both Black isn't mentioned at all by Reddington and this is, once again, a crucial omission.³⁷ It is striking and disappointing that there is absolutely no mention at all of these women being Black yet their names turn up in gender-based analyses, which consider the impact of gender dynamics and power in the underground. Reddington mentions Styrene by name just three times in the book despite her influence. For example, she names her on a laundry list of white women punks who also made contributions to the making of a punk musical style, writing

³⁵ Poly Styrene was punk singer of Scottish/Somali/Irish decent. She formed the punk band X-ray Spex after seeing the Sex Pistols live, making Spex one of the first punk bands to form the U.K. scene. Information on Styrene is quite scarce. I had luck simply googling her and reading through the most recent journalistic publications about her see:
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2017/apr/28/my-mum-the-punk-pioneer-poly-styrenes-daughter-remembers-the-x-ray-spex-leader>,
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/my-secret-life-poly-styrene-singer-51-811129.html>,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/arts/music/poly-styrene-brash-frontwoman-of-x-ray-spex-dies-at-53.html>.

I found a single encyclopedia-style publication, which was useful to an extent. I had hoped to find something more in depth but had no luck.

Gillian Gaar, *She's a Rebel: the History of Women in Rock and Roll*, CA: Seal Press, 1992, print.

³⁶ Dakar was the lead singer of the Bodysnatchers, one of the bands responsible for the UK revival of ska and two-tone, a subgenre, which originated in the U.K. It fuses Jamaican reggae beats with punk. Ska comes from Jamaica and fuses reggae with the Blues and R&B. Ska music was revived in the 1980's and early 90's in California, most notably, with bands who have risen since to legendary status in the punk community such as Operation Ivy and Fishbone. Operation Ivy's Tim Armstrong would go on to form Rancid, one of the most celebrated punk bands of the late 80's. Both of these bands had a major influence on the punk and ska bands that came after them. For more on Fishbone, Operation Ivy, and Rancid, see: *Everyday Sunshine: The Story of Fishbone*, Directed by Lev Anderson and Chris Metzler, Performed by John Norwood Fisher and Angelo Moore, United States: Pale Griot Film, October 7, 2011.

Kevin Prested, *Punk USA: The Rise and Fall of Lookout! Records*, Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2014.

Ian Winwood, *Smash!: Green Day, The Offspring, Rancid, NOFX, and the '90s Punk Explosion*, DeCapo Press, 2018.

³⁷ I struggled to find evidence of these women's racial backgrounds, which I interpreted as a testament to the ways in which scholars and authors of music history have opted to disengage with conversations of women musicians and race. However, I did manage to find this video of Rhoda Dakar briefly discussing her race in relation to the punk scene:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtmNHGbtRw> and this BBC report which references Styrene's mixed-race identity, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR_3Jp8MDuk. Therefore, material exists online. Scholars have barely accessed this limited literature.

Punk singing was almost exclusively declamatory, as practiced by Poly Styrene, Siouxsie, Ari Up of the Slits, Pauline of Penetration, and many others. The emphasis was not on craft, but on feeling. Artists such as these featured vocal performances that consisted of screeching, shouting and chanting reminiscent of girls' playground rhymes (in particular The Slits and Delta 5) that bore no relation to the myth of the Siren.³⁸

Reddington mentions Styrene again by name only to note how "Lora Logic experienced the ill-effects of excessive media praise when Poly Styrene could not cope with sharing the limelight with another woman."³⁹ Reddington ends with two short concluding paragraphs about competition amongst women and the fight for a place in the underground scene using Styrene and Logic, her band-mate, as an example.⁴⁰ While these dynamics may have been a genuine problem for those who subscribed to them, this is not a direction I take in this thesis. I am not concerned about competition among women. Men compete too, which makes it unremarkable. What I aim to highlight is the unifying power of punk as well as the agency it grants to those who listen to and create it.

One set of scholarship that particularly deserves criticism for ignoring Black and Brown punks is the scholarship on Riot Grrrl. Riot Grrrl emerged in 1989 and built steam steadily until 1995 when its popularity began to decline. Riot Grrrl was a source of empowerment for girls who craved the security of knowing there was a community standing behind them, ready at any moment to back them up and lead the way to girl liberation. Riot Grrrl, in many ways, provided the sense of security

³⁸ Reddington, *The Lost Women*, 107-108.

In other words and in terms of vocal style, women punks of this era were less screechy like "sirens" (the mythical creature) and more influenced by the rhymes chanted by young girls at the playground.

³⁹ Ibid., 49.

Lora Logic is another U.K.-based woman punk who played saxophone briefly for X-Ray Spex.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

and respect these girls were lacking in their lives. Riot Grrrl's purpose was twofold: it was both a concept to rally around and a mouthpiece for feminist principles. It also served as a platform for young budding feminists to sound off on the injustices, which affected them most directly.⁴¹ Examples of Riot Grrrl's social activism included talking about sexual assault, harassment, rape, incest, and other crimes against women at shows and in print using fanzines as their medium. Riot grrrls also held meetings where they could come together as a community and discuss different ways of organizing and achieving their goals. Primary sources from the Riot Grrrl era speak volumes about the common perceptions of race shared among white riot grrrls.⁴² The Riot Grrrl Collection, collated by Lisa Darms, is a compilation of handwritten zines, photographs, spoken word pieces, letters, drawings, show flyers and other memorabilia from the era.⁴³ Most of the articles featured in these zines are based on the opinions of anonymous riot grrrls. The anonymity undoubtedly provided these women with what they perceived to be a space where they could be honest, open and unafraid of the potential backlash that ensues when one expresses an unpopular or problematic opinion.

In one piece taken from a zine called "Bikini Kill", which spans several pages, the author expresses her discontent in the form of a numbered list of grievances over the ways in which girls are often belittled and dismissed when they speak out

⁴¹ Gender inequality and LGBT rights fell under this umbrella as well.

⁴² Riot Grrrl began in 1989 and slowly began fading into obscurity in 1995. By 1999, the Riot Grrrl scene was no longer active. See: *Girls to the Front* by Sara Marcus.

⁴³ Lisa Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, New York: Feminist Press, 2013.

A Zine is a publication produced for and by makers of subculture (i.e. scenesters and fans of the music). They come either printed or in digital form and include content such as anonymous opinion pieces, show flyers, interviews with musicians and members of the underground scene, correspondence, etc. Zines are like newsletters for a music scene, they are crucial to helping the underground scene proliferate.

against sexism. However, for the purpose of this thesis, grievance number 10 stands out the most. The author claims to have grown tired of the pressure to care about or engage with the challenges facing women of color.

People think of oppression as a test you can either pass or fail. Ok, you get one point for being poor, one more for being female, but oh no, you score a negative one for being white and able-bodied and..... I'm sorry but it just doesn't work that way... Me writing about this stuff in this zine doesn't mean I think girl oppression is any more important... than racial or species or sexual oppression. It's just that I need to organize around what I know.⁴⁴

The Riot Grrrl Collection also makes considerable mention of LGBT causes, including a list of slang words created and shared among the LGBT community, numerous opinion pieces, coming out pieces, and newspaper clippings of articles about “alternative lifestyles” reproduced in zine form as an act of protest, support, and solidarity with the LGBT community.⁴⁵ Riot Grrrl zines were also an important means for raising awareness about the AIDS epidemic, once widely (and inaccurately) considered by the American media to be a “gay disease”. LGBT rights and Riot Grrrl’s treatment of that cause exemplifies the ways in which Riot Grrrl worked to combat false notions about some marginalized communities that riot grrrls identified with, while essentially turning a cheek on others.

Sarah Marcus’s *Girls to the Front* was the first work to chronicle the Riot Grrrl movement in narrative form. The title itself, *Grrrls to the Front*, is a nod to Kathleen

⁴⁴ Darms, 24.

⁴⁵ Cishetero individuals have subtly and dismissively acknowledged the existence of queer relationships and sexuality by instead referring to them as “alternative lifestyles”. The LGBT community faced significant pushback in the fight for equal rights throughout the Riot Grrrl era of the 1990’s. One example was the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy implemented by the Clinton administration in 1993 in order to keep LGBT folks from being openly gay while they serve in the U.S. military. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/dont-ask-dont-tell-timeline/>

Hanna's⁴⁶ signature rallying call for bringing girls to the front of the stage at her shows. This was how Hanna ensured that the women who came to shows would not be pushed to the back of the venue as a result of boys aggressively slam dancing⁴⁷ and physically (or even creatively) dominating the space. Therefore, the title itself is Marcus's way of incorporating examples of Riot Grrrl's signature brand of resistance into the narrative before the reader makes it to the first page.⁴⁸

There were many injustices that Riot Grrrl claimed to want to eradicate or at least draw attention to, including racism and homophobia. *Girls to the Front* addressed many of the concerns championed by the Riot Grrrl movement. However, many of those concerns took a backseat to the book's primary focus on sexism and sexual abuse within the punk scene in major cities like Washington D.C. and Olympia, Washington. This decision allowed Marcus to capture the spirit and the energy of a musical genre and political movement that has been virtually dead for almost twenty years.⁴⁹ In reference to the music that came out of the Riot Grrrl

⁴⁶ Hanna, along with her Bikini Kill band mates, Tobi Vail and Kathi Wilcox, are credited with pioneering a punk music scene specifically for and executed by women, which later became known as Riot Grrrl.

⁴⁷ For a full description of slam dancing, refer to chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁴⁸ *Girls to the Front* initially introduced readers to a teenaged Kathleen Hanna and later, her friend Tobi circa 1992, as well as a few other pioneering teenaged riot grrrls. This part of the book effectively lays the groundwork for understanding the origins of Riot Grrrl and offers us our first glimpse of desperation, a theme within the movement. Desperation and lack of support and representation permeated the lives of riot grrrls in the making. What they desired more than anything was a safe space where they could live their lives by those famed Bikini Kill lyrics, daring to be who they wanted to be and perhaps even more profoundly, doing so unabashedly. For Bikini Kill lyrics, see appendix i.

⁴⁹ Riot Grrrl faded almost entirely into obscurity by 1999, in part because those involved with the movement were moving on to new creative projects. Morale among riot grrrls also plummeted as the scene expanded. The music and the message was repackaged and redistributed among the mainstream community (known more simply as those in society who do not participate in any kind of counter or subculture), giving riot grrrls the impression that folks who did not truly understand the struggle that pushed Riot Grrrl into existence had diluted the spirit of the scene, thus abandoning it altogether. For more see: Kristin Schilt, "'A Little Too Irony': The Appropriation and Packaging of

movement, Marcus argues, "The punk world was just as oblivious [to sexism and violent misogyny] as the world at large. How could gender be irrelevant when so many girls were coming to Kathleen in tears... when they had to open for a band in Ohio whose singer blurted, between songs, 'incest is best, put your sister to the test'... what fantasyland were these other [people] living in?"⁵⁰

Marcus frequently used personal anecdotes and first hand accounts such as this to argue for the necessity of safe spaces for women. Riot Grrrl shows provided one example. Her study included stories from the road, performances, encounters with men in the street, young girls experiencing trauma in various forms, baring their souls to musicians at shows because there was simply no one else willing to hear them, etc. These anecdotes helped Marcus to build her narrative around the very thing that sparked and sustained Riot Grrrl movement, the desire for a safe space. Above all else, Marcus concluded, the Riot Grrrl movement was about the real life struggle of being a young woman, doubly disrespected for her gender and age, during the post-Reagan era.⁵¹ The first reference to persons of color in Marcus' conversation about Riot Grrrl appears on page 64 when Molly Neuman, a white woman and drummer of Riot Grrrl band Bratmobile,⁵² talks about her initial attraction to Riot Grrrl, claiming that it was Riot Grrrl's unrelenting ferocity that caught her attention. She felt that Riot Grrrl's ideology and refusal to apologize or

Riot Grrrl Politics by Mainstream Female Musicians," *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 1 (2003): 5-16.

⁵⁰ Marcus, 42.

⁵¹ Ronald Reagan completed his final term as the American president in 1989. We as a country are still recovering from many of the major social and economic policies implemented by Reagan during his presidency.

⁵² One of three bands that made up the holy trinity of Riot Grrrl music, along with Bikini Kill and Heavens to Betsy.

backtrack on those ideologies was comparable to the Civil Rights Movement that swept through her native city, Washington D.C. in the 1960's just twenty years before Riot Grrrl broke out. Unfortunately, Marcus missed an opportunity to elaborate on Neuman's assessment about the Civil Rights Movement.

In chapter four, Marcus notes that race and cultural variation were rarely a topic of discussion in Riot Grrrl spaces and in the art that came from them. In this respect, she is incorrect because of the fact that several Latinas and African American girls identified with and appreciated the feminist message Riot Grrrl tried to deliver. Marcus states that riot grrrls only aimed "to get it right this time" in reference to people of color constantly being left out of conversations and activist spaces that they should have been included in.⁵³ Marcus critiqued the greater Riot Grrrl community and argued that

[Riot grrrls] were good at talking about what they had in common, but they weren't sure how to approach their differences... while a majority of the people involved were white and middle-class, quite a few were Latina or black, or Asian... these things were rarely discussed.⁵⁴

Marcus's writing of this part is vague and her point is unclear, made no more transparent by the fact that the following paragraph was about something completely different. Marcus's comments are just a statement of fact without an accompanying analysis or critique, which would have added substance, context, and nuance to a common and complicated problem in music in general, not just punk scenes or the microscene that Riot Grrrl was. In this regard, even though she includes a brief mention of Black, Latina, and Asian women in the scene, her simple

⁵³ Marcus, 122.

⁵⁴ Marcus, 121.

throwaway sentence “these things were rarely discussed” contributes to the whitewashing of Riot Grrrl history by not delving further into the experiences of these women. Sara Marcus’s *Girls to the Front* establishes sexism and misogyny as both the rallying cry and enemy of the Riot Grrrl movement but limits her discussion of race to a couple of paragraphs twice in a 335 page book.⁵⁵

To conclude, the primary goal of my thesis work is to bring recognition to Black and Brown women, the unsung heroines of the punk music they made and loved. My thesis aims to rewrite a part of musical history that has not only forgotten the Black and Brown women who helped construct it, but also never adequately recognized its female trailblazers at all. It is necessary to demand that these women be made visible in both academia and music history. They should be celebrated not just among their peers and fans but in the scholarship of women, music, and history as well.

A Note on Methodology

Race is the focal point of my analysis. I use oral history to help me tell the story of being a Black/Brown woman in the punk underground. I interviewed two women, both front women of their respective bands. My first interviewee was

⁵⁵ The book mentions more than once the ways that Riot Grrrl has been scrutinized for embodying a white feminist agenda at the exclusion of women of color. For example, in the book Marcus writes about a riot grrrl named Jessica who gave an interview about Riot Grrrl to *Newsweek*. The interviewer described Jessica as “typical” for Riot Grrrl due to her white middle class background. Marcus uses the interviewer’s statement as an example of how “for each reasonable assessment the article contained, another line [seemed to be making] generalizations about its members.” Yet Marcus makes no attempt in the book to prove that such a general claim is in fact false. The statement did not read like a critique but rather a statement of fact, as Riot Grrrl was indeed most popular among young, white, middle class women. Marcus responds in typical hurt white feminist fashion, describing the statement in the *Newsweek* article as a gross generalization of the movement as a whole. Marcus says nothing else to this point as it is not her goal to bring Black and Brown women/feminists into her overall discussion of the movement. Marcus repeats this mistake in chapter four (Marcus, 212).

Victoria Ruiz whom I chose because she is Latina and has been active in various local punk scenes for over a decade. Her band, DOWNTOWN BOYS, based out of Providence, Rhode Island are on the brink of national success, having appeared on NPR and in *Rolling Stone Magazine* more than once.⁵⁶ DOWNTOWN BOYS also have deep ties to the labor organizing community there. Its founding members met organizing, making Ruiz an ideal subject for this thesis, which I will discuss further in the final two chapters.

I conducted my second oral history with SATE, a musician from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. I chose SATE for my second oral history because while SATE's music might not be considered punk, she personifies the don't-give-a-fuck attitude that punk is known for. She makes loud, emotion-packed rock music because she wants to do it and because she enjoys the exchange of energy with others. SATE's oral history helped me to think more critically about the important role of anger and emotion in music-making and in the special context of live punk performance which is often so chaotic that one has no choice but to be present in it and feel all the energy as fully as possible. SATE's oral history, although I was not able to use very much of it due to time, helped me to establish that Black and Brown women were and still are making this music, even if folks rarely talk about it.

I also reviewed two oral histories that I discovered through the "Women Who Rock Oral History Project", an archival collection of interviews at the University of Washington. The first featured Chola Con Cello and Alice Bag of the

⁵⁶ <https://www.npr.org/artists/519502796/downtown-boys>
<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/downtown-boys-meet-americas-most-exciting-punk-band-20151211>

Bags⁵⁷ conducted February 19, 2011. The second featured Medusa, interviewed by Mako Fitts and Michelle Habel-Pallan, professor of Women's Studies at Seattle University and Arizona State and Women Who Rock Archive Director, respectively. I chose Medusa's interview because she is a fixture of L.A.'s hip hop underground, sometimes referred to as the "godmother of west coast hip hop."⁵⁸ I used her interview mainly for inspiration and because it provided great insights into the experience of being a woman navigating an underground music scene. In fact, my original plan for this thesis was to use both punk and hip hop music as a vehicle for exploring the experiences of women in music. From there, this idea evolved to include a focus on music from the underground. Further, the scholarship of music offered much in terms of hip hop and feminism but little of punk and feminism. So finally, due to time constraints, I settled on Black and Brown women in punk alone.

These interviews helped me prepare for my own interviews, showing me how to conduct an oral history with a musician to be used for academic research purposes. The oral histories also helped me to construct a well-rounded depiction of one Black/Brown feminist experience, as I have personally experienced it. My oral histories helped me bring life to the claims I will make about race and misogyny in white male-dominated spaces.

The Riot Grrrl Collection has been an especially important source for me, particularly the zines, for the way they capture these women's voices in ways that photographs or lyrics cannot. Zines from this era, and those, which are included in this collection, have proven to be particularly useful in tracing the history and

⁵⁷ For more on the Bags, see chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁵⁸ <http://content.lib.washington.edu/wwwweb/making-scenes/bioMedusa.html>

social/cultural impact of the underground.

My research on zines brought me to the special collections archive at Fales Library (New York University) as well as the special collections at Cornell University. In addition, I consulted Lisa Darms' collection of zines and show/meeting flyers from the Riot Grrrl period (1989-1996) and various zines that are still in print providing me a comprehensive understanding of modern zine culture. It was also this collection that illuminated for me the discrepancy in scholarship and resources regarding female punks of color.

The first chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the history of punk both in the U.K. and the United States, focusing on notable women in the scene. It provides insights into their experiences as scenesters and musicians in a different space and time. The second chapter introduces us to the underground punk scene, explaining what the underground scene is and the role that it plays in local communities. The third and final chapter explores the modern day punk scene, featuring oral histories conducted with Providence punk scene participant, Victoria Ruiz whose band Downtown Boys has been steadily making waves in the music community on the local and national level, for several years. I also interviewed Toronto-based rock blues woman, SATE, whose oral history provided many insights into the roots of rock & roll and the emotion that fuels her own music. Time unfortunately did not allow for me to utilize SATE's oral history to the same extent as Ruiz's.

The chapters are tied together by the argument and possibility that punks could have been sexist or racist in some regards as well as the impact that could

have had on both the scope of the scholarship of punk and the Black and Brown women punks who were a part of the underground scene. The final chapter attempts a look toward the future of underground punk from the perspectives and position of women punks of color, specifically Ruiz.

Chapter I: A Wave of History

Blues is the foundation of rock 'n' roll, period. Blues women to me are rock 'n' roll women. So that's why I gravitate towards them. They say what they want, they say what's on their mind, they say what they need. They're unabashed, they're unafraid, they're fearless... that's what fuels my fire when it comes to doing "white music" which is really Black music and being inspired by Blues women.⁵⁹

Some argue that punk was born across the pond in England in 1975 with the Sex Pistols and the fashion they inspired.⁶⁰ I maintain that Queens, New York is the true birthplace of this music form. In terms of the making of an authentically punk sound, a Queens, New York-based band called the Ramones combined music styles to create a sound that was at once manic, discordant, danceable and catchy. *Rolling Stone Magazine* once described the Ramones' sound as "a kind of bonehead genius".⁶¹ The Ramones were major contributors to the making of punk as a legitimate subgenre of Rock 'n' Roll. They set the standard every punk band would follow. Today, punk songs are still distinguishable by their short bursts of energy, repetition, and abrupt endings, a formula established by the Ramones in 1974, when they first started making music together as a band.⁶²

They were not looking to be pioneers but pioneers they were and what they

⁵⁹ SATE, Transcript of an oral history conducted in 2017, Interview by Courtney Aucone.

⁶⁰ See: Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, UMI Research Press, 1989. Henry does not argue that the music form started there, only the eccentric fashion mainstream society knew it for. However, this is definitely a reason why the misconception regarding the birthplace of punk exists.

⁶¹ Andy Greene, www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/the-ramones/biography. (Selections from *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*.)

⁶² The Ramones' sound comes from the garage rock tradition, fast paced and bursting with energy. Garage rock was popular in the 1950's and early 60's and can be described as music created by amateur musicians, usually in their homes (or garages, hence the name), just for the fun of it. Gathering a group of friends and forming a band is a great way to establish community and camaraderie, two things that certainly impacted punk's widespread, international appeal.

lacked in musical sophistication and skill they made up for in attitude.⁶³ Lyrical content related to boredom, high school, parents, everyday ordinary occurrences, apathy, or in other words, nothing of great importance, were common at the time as punk would not begin to develop its political consciousness for another decade, with the rise of hardcore punk in major cities like New York and Washington D.C.⁶⁴ The final part of the punk rock formula, initiated by the Velvet Underground⁶⁵ and their contemporaries and later solidified by the Ramones, was the general lack of musical order and sophistication, two things that punk continues to be both celebrated and criticized for.⁶⁶ In an article for Uproxx, a news website with an emphasis on popular culture, Chris Morgan writes, "The Ramones had a distinct sound, fast, loud,

⁶³ The Ramones were not known for being particularly skilled or practiced on their instruments and their sets averaged around twenty minutes.

⁶⁴ Ramones songs such as "Rockaway Beach" and "Do You Wanna Dance" off of the album "Rocket to Russia" (1977) are great examples of prototypical playful, upbeat punk songs, simple in subject matter but powerful in sound. The Ramones did an excellent job of capturing the monotony of everyday life as a teenager coming up in Forest Hills, Queens, a fact further indicative of just how rooted punk rock is in an ideology of boredom and reckless abandon.

⁶⁵ The Velvet Underground, along with bands like the New York Dolls and Richard Hell and the Voidoids were purveyors of punk rock ideology, sound, and style before it became known as such. The Velvet Underground formed in 1964 and the New York Dolls in 1971, both in New York City. For more on Richard Hell and the Voidoids, see the following page of this thesis.

Lou Reed, front man of the Velvet Underground, explored dark themes lyrically, which was a departure from what was popular at the time. Examples include the songs *Venus in Furs*, inspired by the sexual practices associated with BDSM (Bondage and Discipline/Dominance and Submission/Sadomasochism), and *Heroin*, a song about drug abuse and addiction. Tricia Henry argues that the hit song of the year (1966), "I'm a Believer", written by Neil Diamond and performed by the Monkees, was starkly different from the themes in Reed's lyrics. Of the Velvet Underground's innovative musical style, Henry writes, "Technically, Reed accentuates the theme of heroin use [In the song, "Heroin"] by employing a rhythmical structure which imitates the heroin rush experienced by a user. The song begins at a moderate tempo, then accelerates in the second verse. The lull/rush/lull theme is repeated several times throughout the song. This is unusual in rock-and-roll compositions, which usually maintain a steady tempo from beginning to end, and adhere to a strophic form which gives a strong sense of predictability through sheer repetition." Henry describes the "amateur quality" of the Velvet Underground's music and the spontaneity of their live performances, what are known today as two major elements of punk rock performance. (Henry, *Break All Rules!*, 14-15.)

⁶⁶ Although bands like NOFX and Talking Heads, technically considered a "post-punk" band, a subgenre of punk, continuously challenged that notion by experimenting with sounds and switching up their overall style. See: "Punk in Drublic" (1994) and "Speaking in Tongues" (1983), respectively. NOFX is an L.A. based punk band that formed in 1983. They are known to engage explicitly with the taboo in their music. Four former art students in New York City formed Talking Heads in 1975. Their music was a fusion of a variety of musical styles, though primarily punk, funk, and electronic.

and energetic, that was a departure from what was popular at the time. They were zigging where most were zagging, and they did it in a way that impressed people. That's why you are reading an article about *Ramones*, and not about some other album released by one of their contemporaries."⁶⁷ While the Ramones' predecessors, the Velvet Underground and Richard Hell and their contemporaries such as Patti Smith were more poetic and gravitated towards darker themes in their music such as drug abuse, self-destruction, mental illness, suicide, and death, the Ramones focused on having a good time with friends, bringing an element of playfulness to punk that their predecessors lacked. Bands such as Green Day, Blink-182, and the Donnas later found varying degrees of commercial success imitating this playfulness.⁶⁸

As punk continued to develop and take root as a legitimate musical style, so did the fashion. Coming into a new decade (the 1980's), it became clear that society was bearing witness to the making of its next major counterculture. Bands and early punk acts such as the Velvet Underground and Richard Hell⁶⁹ began to make waves with their antics on and off stage as well as with their unique styles of dress. Richard Hell and Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground are primarily responsible for developing the early aesthetics of punk, the style and the attitude that distinguishes

⁶⁷ Chris Morgan, "How The Ramones Changed The Face Of Rock Music With Their Debut Album," UPROXX, April 23, 2016, Accessed November 13, 2017. <http://uproxx.com/music/ramones-debut-album-punk-rock/>.

⁶⁸ See "Dookie" (1994), "Enema of the State" (1999), and "The Donnas" (1998) respectively.

⁶⁹ Richard Hell was a member of New York's underground music scene in the 1970's. He started the band *Television* in 1972, then known as *Neon Boys* before forming Richard Hell and the Voidoids in 1976. Both bands were well known in the scene but Hell is best known for his influence on punk style. Hell often dressed in ripped clothing secured by safety pins and sported a spikey hair do. This look inspired Malcolm McLaren, a young English man looking to commodify punk either by signing a popular punk act or opening a clothing store in London. McLaren found success through the latter, opening *Sex* in 1974, specializing in the punk fashion inspired by Hell and the New York Dolls. This is how spiked hair and safety pins first made their way to the U.K.

punk from the wide range of subgenres that fall under the umbrella of rock 'n' roll. These figureheads inspired the development of an authentically punk "look".⁷⁰

Since punk's inception, there have been two official waves that saw a revival of the music itself as well as from the public. I would argue that we are currently experiencing a third wave that includes more Black and Brown folks than ever before. The first wave began in the late 1960's, spilling into the next decade, with the rise of CBGB⁷¹ and the New York City punk scene. Caroline Coon, artist, former manager of the Clash, and author of *1988, The New Wave Punk Explosion* writes in reference to the first wave, "Certainly the basic stance of the movement [was] highly aggressive and emotionally intense. But the press failed to make any rational analysis of the aggression. Instead, the incidence of violence, taken out of context,⁷² was greatly exaggerated."⁷³ This statement refers to punks' developing and partially inaccurate international reputation for being rebellious disturbers of the peace whose most significant contributions to society included inciting disorder and rebelling for the sake of rebellion.

⁷⁰ Think shaggy hair, ripped jeans and black, mod-style clothing (specific to the early scene in NYC, circa 67' and into the early 70's), safety pins, anarchy "A's", fascist symbols meant to shock the public, spiked hair, or no hair (specific to the early scene in the U.K., same time frame).

⁷¹ CBGB was a nightclub and a hub for the punk subculture in NYC. It opened in 1973 and closed in 2006. Every notable punk act from the Ramones and Patti Smith to Blondie to Green Day played CBGB. <http://www.cbgb.com/about>

⁷² Coon is referring to the Sex Pistols and their reputation for public political protest, particularly their now infamous performance of "God Save the Queen" during Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee celebration in 1977. The Pistols made national headlines for performing a song, which criticizes the British government's failing relationship with Britain's working class. Furthermore, the band's run-ins with the law were frequent and well documented in the media as they rose to and eventually fell from fame. See:

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/flashback-nancy-spungen-found-dead-at-chelsea-hotel-w508409>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1979/02/02/archives/sid-vicious-released-from-jail.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/oct/09/from-rocks-backpages-talk-talk-sid-vicious-nancy-spungen>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcFp-eKKIws>

⁷³ Caroline Coon, *1988: The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion*, London: Omnibus Press, 1978, 126.

The second wave was initiated in the 1990's and remained consistently popular throughout, receiving far more mainstream acceptance, recognition, and honors than the former. This is because American punk's first wave was cast off as a shocking and aggressive rejection of the sensibilities of middle class American society on one hand and a drastic departure from the hippie culture of the 1960's on the other. First wave American punks considered hippie culture to be laughable and overly idealistic. This is in part due to the fact that punk's first wave rose to notoriety in working/middle class American neighborhoods across decades marked historically by political unrest.⁷⁴ It can also be attributed to the ways in which record companies were marketing music at the time, realizing the marketability of punk and packaging it in a way that was readily received by a greater audience.⁷⁵ Thus pop punk, a subgenre, was born.

In contrast, punk's second wave gained prominence among a huge audience of mostly white youth who were waiting for something exciting to step in and save them from the monotony of the average college or suburban experience, something like punk. Punk was cool and so naturally, college aged kids ate it right up. Riot Grrrl

⁷⁴ Most notably, the Civil Rights Movement and the much protested war in Vietnam of the 1960's and the Reagan era of the 1980's which brought on significant changes to the American economy and a war on drugs that transparently targeted, vilified, and villainized Black and Brown neighborhoods. For more on this subject, see:

Bruce Michael Bagley, "US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Analysis of a Policy Failure," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 2/3 (1988): 189.

Jeremy Kuzmarov, *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.

Justin S. Vaughn and José D. Villalobos, "Commanding the War on Drugs: The Drug Czar and the Office of National Drug Control Policy," In *Czars in the White House: The Rise of Policy Czars as Presidential Management Tools*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015.

⁷⁵ Examples include Green Day, Blink-182, and the explosion of grunge with musical acts partial to a heavier, darker, punk-influenced sound such as Pearl Jam and Nirvana. For further reading, see: Jan Jagodzinski, "The "Grunge" of Punk-Rock: Slacking Off," *Music in Youth Culture*, 2005, 111-22.

is one specific example of music and culture with punk roots that gained prominence among college-educated youth.

The music was also known for being really loud. To this point, SATE, one of the subjects of my oral histories claimed that sometimes, “there are little backhanded comments [about me as a woman and a performer of sexuality, power and aggression] and I’m like, fuck all of you. Because this is what I love to do and I know that what I do is really damn good and people like it so if you don’t like it loud then go somewhere else.”⁷⁶ This is merely one reflection of a common attitude shared by punks regarding punk’s unorthodox nature and the pride punks take in being a part of something irregular, informal, and way beyond the margins of mainstream society.

While the underground punk scene was and continues to be dominated by men, a number of women influenced or played an important part in establishing some of the earlier trends in punk style, both musical and aesthetic. Spoken word poet and front woman Patti Smith, of the Patti Smith Group, receives just as much credit as other punk innovators such as the Ramones and the Sex Pistols for the role she played in establishing certain parameters around punk as a music form independent of its parent genres, garage rock (U.S.) and pub rock (U.K.).⁷⁷

Patti arrived on the New York City Avant-Garde art scene in the early 1970’s

⁷⁶ SATE, Transcript of an oral history conducted in 2017, Interview by Courtney Aucone.

⁷⁷ Andrew Bennett writes, “‘Pub Rock’ first became a topic of popular discourse during the early 1970’s when London was the centre of pop music’s own ‘back to basics’ movement. At that time, many musicians resented what they saw as an increasingly elitist sensibility in popular music, spearheaded by the development of progressive rock with its emphasis upon technical expertise and stadium-oriented performance. Consequently, such musicians sought an alternative and more accessible medium for the performance and consumption of their music.”

Andrew Bennett, “‘Going Down the Pub!’: the Pub Rock Scene as a Resource for the Consumption of Popular Music,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), pp. 97-108.

where she began performing spoken word in various art spaces, most notably, the former Mercer Arts Center.⁷⁸ Smith boasted a presence onstage that was unique and made her difficult to forget. Gillian Gaar writes in reference to the photograph on the cover of Smith's first album *Horses*, and regarding how Smith presented herself onstage at the time of its release, "... Smith was no ordinary female singer: skinny, dressed in jeans and a white shirt with a tie draped around her neck, Smith faced the camera with a defiant, uncompromising stare. Her commanding, androgynous presence presented a view of a female performer that hadn't been seen on a record cover before, and the music on the record was just as striking."⁷⁹ Pop punk acts such as Avril Levigne would replicate this look and imitate Smith's signature intensity decades later,⁸⁰ showing the connection between punk and the trends set by Smith nearly half a century ago.⁸¹

Gaar describes Smith's style, "*Horses* freely mixed rock and poetry, a reflection of Smith's apparent disinterest in conventional song structures... Smith's biting delivery was something new for a female singer... her strong stance naturally provoked equally strong reactions." Nevertheless, Smith was able to reach a level of mainstream success, breaching the Billboard top 20 in 1978 with the release of

⁷⁸ Smith's contemporaries, the Velvet Underground, also enjoyed use of this space as a venue for getting their art/music out to the public. The Velvet Underground's John Cale ended up producing Smith's first album *Horses* (1975), which proves just how interconnected these New York-based punk rock prototypes truly were during this period. It also indicates that a sense of community and intimacy was being forged within the scene and between punks, which is a major aspect of the DIY lifestyle that thrived as the small scene expanded. DIY is an acronym for "do it yourself". For more on the relationship between DIY and punk, see page six and chapter two of this thesis.

⁷⁹ Gillian Gaar, *She's a Rebel: the History of Women in Rock & Roll*, 2nd ed., (New York: Seal Press), 2002, p 196.

⁸⁰ Circa 2002 upon release of Levigne's debut studio album *Let Go*.

⁸¹ Pop punk can be described as listener-friendly punk. Pop punk music presents the listener with a cleaner sound while still maintaining the integrity of punk. It is radio friendly and appeals to a wider audience due to its marriage punk and pop.

Easter, her third studio album.⁸² Punk rock grew out of some of the trends originally set by Patti Smith. Her rough and raw singing style as well as her countenance both on and off stage, indifferent yet focused, and her overall vibe, aloof by all accounts, contributed great inspiration to the ideology of boredom that punk became known for. Smith is indeed a punk rock pioneer and icon and is consistently acknowledged as such by punk rock scholars, musicians and fans alike.⁸³ This trajectory of success played out differently for Black and Brown women punks because Black and Brown women were already painted as being innately angry and aggressive, less feminine,⁸⁴ less respectable and thus less deserving of credit for the good work they've done. This has proven true for punk as well.

Across the pond in the U.K., a young Black woman by the name of Marion Elliot was searching for a suitable creative outlet. She began in fashion, opening a clothing shop on Kings Road in London, entirely merchandised by her own designs. Then, in true punk rock fashion,⁸⁵ she decided she wanted to be in a band and create music, so she started one, playing the club next door to her clothing shop. She had

⁸² Gaar, p 197.

⁸³ See: Carrie Jaures Noland, "Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Spring, 1995), 581-610.

Mike Daley, "Patti Smith's 'Gloria': Intertextual Play in a Rock Vocal Performance", *Popular Music*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (October 1997), Cambridge University Press, 235-253.

"Patti Smith: Dream of Life," film, 2008, directed by Steven Sebring.

(This film won the excellence in cinematography award in the documentary category at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival.)

Patti Smith and Thurston Moore, "Blast From the Past", *BOMB*, No. 107 (Spring, 2009), New Art Publications, 46.

⁸⁴ Anger and aggression are words used most often to describe men and their relationship to power in a favorable way. When folks use these words to describe women, it is rarely a compliment. Racism amplifies this specific manifestation of sexism.

⁸⁵ Like the pub and garage rockers who came before her, not especially skilled in the art of music making but still a creative type in need of an artistic/emotional outlet, Styrene decided to try her hand at something she thought she would like. She and her contemporaries were not concerned with being musical virtuosos. They simply wanted to create art with a message. This is part of where punk's DIY ideology stems from.

already released a reggae record by that point, which did not sell well.⁸⁶ However she was determined to stick with music as her medium. After seeing the Sex Pistols perform for the first time, Elliot knew that she had found her niche and was eager to join the burgeoning London-based punk scene. Shortly after, Elliot gave herself a new name, Poly Styrene, and in 1976, X-Ray Spex the band was born.

Not only was Styrene one of the first women to front a punk band, she was also one of the first punks to incorporate political messages into her lyrics she. I can only imagine how radical this young Black woman must have come across to the all-white audiences she played for in London. The world at large still struggles to acknowledge women's voices in a respectful manner. Considering Styrene's youth⁸⁷, Blackness, and ability to project her voice in recognition of society's harsh realities, Styrene goes down in punk rock history as a figure that rocked the boat with purpose and intent. Many of her contemporaries were not quite so calculated and intentional. Her musical and personal style dared to stray from the standard U.K. practice at the time of donning fascist symbols and swastikas for shock value. Rather than all black like the Ramones she wore bright neon colors and instead of metal chokers and bondage collars like the Sex Pistols she wore braces. Her innovative style made her one of the first people on record to bring us into the experimental

⁸⁶ "In 1976 she released a pop-reggae single under the name Mari Elliot on the GTO label." See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/arts/music/poly-styrene-brash-frontwoman-of-x-ray-spex-dies-at-53.html>.

⁸⁷ Styrene was 19 years old when she started X-Ray Spex. Youth is often considered to be an indicator of inexperience and therefore lack of credibility. Youth and gender are used repeatedly as a way of discrediting women such as Styrene who have laid the actual groundwork for important cultural occurrences that men eventually take or are given credit for. This is why we have an excess of biographies in print about members of the Sex Pistols and the Clash and none about Styrene.

post-punk era of the 1980's.⁸⁸ Styrene made a conscious choice to navigate her lived experiences as a Black woman in white spaces and a capitalist society through her music when others were not making such statements. Styrene was one of the first to make punk for this purpose and political awareness and activism gradually became two crucial components of the punk underground in the 1980's and 90's because of her influence.⁸⁹

Styrene had a firm idea of what needed to be said (or shouted) and what she wanted to say when she took the stage. The bold delivery of her political beliefs through music indicates a level of self-awareness about the potential impact or perhaps discomfort her lyrics could cause, especially for the white folks in the audience. Her mere presence in the scene and the role she assumed as a musician

⁸⁸ "Post-punk" describes what became of punk, as it established itself in the 1980's as a respectable music genre. Punk scenes started popping up all over the world as it drew people in with promises of an outlet for their angst and an overall vibe that was dangerously cool. It comes as no surprise that punk exploded as it did among the bored, bratty, and agitated middle class youth of America. I would argue that boredom was common among American white youth of the earliest punk era who were privileged so much so that their greatest concern was how they would keep themselves entertained from day to day and not how they would survive the crack and AIDS epidemics that pillaged low income communities of color throughout the following two decades. https://web.archive.org/web/20070715212213/http://www.ussc.gov/r_congress/02crack/2002crackrpt.pdf (p 62-63).

Ernest Drucker, "Communities at Risk: The Social Epidemiology of AIDS in New York City," In *AIDS and the Social Sciences: Common Threads*, 45-63, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

Michelle Alexander, *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In the Age of Colorblindness*, New Press, 2016.

At the same time, there have been a number of punk acts during and since the first wave of punk, which aimed to create art as activism. For more on this, see chapters two and three of this thesis. Punk activism began to really take off in the 1980's with the rise of "hardcore" punk in major cities such as Washington D.C., L.A. and of course, New York City. Activism maintained its influence on punk and the corresponding scene throughout the 1990's and into the new millennium, making it an essential aspect of punk history and identity. A few examples of punk protest records include Anti-Flag's *Underground Network* (2001), Green Day's *American Idiot* (2004), and Rise Against's *The Sufferer and the Witness* (2006). Anti-Flag, Green Day, and Rise Against are from Pittsburgh, Oakland, California, and Chicago, respectively. For more on "hardcore" punk, see: *American Hardcore*, Directed by Paul Rachman, Sony Pictures Classics, 2007.

Shaun Cullen, "White Skin, Black Flag: Hardcore Punk, Racialization, and the Politics of Sound in Southern California," *Criticism* 58, no. 1 (2016): 59-85.

⁸⁹ See Appendix i for lyrics.

was a challenge to the baseline of whiteness in the early days of the punk underground. As a punk fan both Brown and femme, finding out that Styrene existed meant that not only was I not the singular girl of color in this community but there were women out there in the world who paved the way for me to be here. Styrene's anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist message challenged her audience to confront uncomfortable truths. Further, and regardless of whether or not her audience realized it, her Blackness challenged social constructions of race that created long-standing barriers within non-white communities,⁹⁰ a concept known by another name as institutional racism.⁹¹

X-Ray Spex's small discography is about identity and anti-consumerism thematically.⁹² Still, Styrene was apparently unperturbed by the prospect of varying and unpredictable responses to her music and the potential danger/backlash her mixed race identity might create from within a community that was and is overwhelmingly white. To this point Gaar argues, "By not being thin, white, or conventionally 'feminine,' Styrene's mere presence in a rock band was enough to challenge convention, and her songs, which cheerfully attacked the materialism of the modern world, added to that challenge."⁹³ With songs like "Identity"⁹⁴ and "The Day the World Turned Day Glo",⁹⁵ Styrene helped usher punk into a new era of

⁹⁰ When I say non-white I mean Black and Brown folks. That includes those of Asian, Latin American, African and indigenous descent.

⁹¹ For more on institutional racism see:

Karim Murji, "Sociological Engagements: Institutional Racism and Beyond," *Sociology* 41, no. 5 (2007): 843-55.

⁹² See X-Ray Spex, *Germ Free Adolescents*, 1978, Vinyl recording.

⁹³ Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: the History of Women in Rock & Roll*, 2nd ed., (New York: Seal Press), 2002, 200.

⁹⁴ See appendix i.

⁹⁵ See appendix i.

political awareness.

In October 1977, X-Ray Spex dropped “Oh Bondage, Up Yours!” on Virgin Records, which in spite of its controversial lyrical content would become their most popular song. The opening line packs a serious punch in the proverbial gut of the patriarchy with Styrene belting the words, “Some people think little girls should be seen and not heard, but I think... OH BONDAGE, UP YOOOOUUUUURS!!!!” The message here is obvious. This first lyric is powerful because it evokes memories of first hand experiences with this particular brand of sexism.⁹⁶ The song continues with Styrene shouting “Bind me, tie me, chain me to the wall, I want to be a slave to you all.” This is an example of some of the earliest lyrical content to come out of the burgeoning punk movement, which offers a commentary on society’s failure of marginalized communities. Styrene’s lyrics, “I want to be a slave to you all”, are a response to the ways society attempts to police women, control them, and force them into a mold of womanhood, femininity, and blind consumerism (of good and ideas) that does not resonate or feel right. Styrene highlights the oppression of women and aims to establish that women are not and should not be considered society’s weak victims but rather politically active opponents of their own oppression. By incorporating her politics and beliefs about identity and capitalism into her music, Styrene enables me as a listener to relate and connect with her on a deeper, more personal level. The lyrics of Styrene’s songs are few with much repetition yet they say a great deal. Their core messages are empowering for this reason and most certainly both resonated and continue to resonate.

⁹⁶ I am referring to the kind of sexism, which grossly underestimates the abilities of the individual solely because that individual is a woman.

Riot Grrrl

Riot Grrrl was a musical and political movement that sprung out of the Northwestern college circuit circa 1992.⁹⁷ It was also a subcultural movement and an offset of the punk community that expanded throughout California and the Pacific Northwest in the late 1980's and early 90's. It was born out of a need for a punk/music scene that was more inclusive of women, where women and girls could feel safe from the sexual harassment and physical violence that often takes place at shows.⁹⁸ Riot Grrrl also provided the space for more women and girls to come out to shows and play their own shows in a time when white boys and men dominated the scene. Riot Grrrl was mostly concerned with several causes that serve as the baseline of its political ideology, causes that distinguish it from other feminist movements, both old and new. Those concerns included sex positivity, rape, sexual assault, "girl love" (both romantic and friendly), youth organizing and activism, patriarchy, misogyny, reproductive rights, incest, LGBT awareness and solidarity, and the DIY mentality, which made Riot Grrrl so special and helped it thrive however briefly.

DIY or "do it yourself" was the mantra that riot grrrls rallied behind. DIY meant creating their own methods of collective action unique to the Riot Grrrl

⁹⁷ Refer to pages 15-21 of this thesis for more on Riot Grrrl.

⁹⁸ Punk shows frequently take place in small, poorly lit bars or other kinds of venues. Anything from groping to drug abuse can occur in these spaces, making punk shows a potentially dangerous, unpredictable place for a woman to go alone. Further, there is no guarantee that this kind of abuse will garner consequences or even be acknowledged by the greater punk community. Such is the cycle of misogyny and sexual abuse. For more on where the fight against sexual assault is going today in the United States specifically, refer to the "#MeToo" movement. For more on what spawned "#MeToo", see: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories>
<https://www.timesupnow.com>

movement. Riot Grrrl groups asked listeners and fans to stop getting angry at a society that undervalued and ignored them and start taking action. Riot Grrrl encouraged women and girls to speak out. Or better yet, write it down and publish a zine for the community to appreciate. Riot Grrrl was about music and action. Wishing someone would organize around issues that actually matter to you as a woman? Riot Grrrl would have encouraged you to lace up your Docs and take to the streets. Does the lack of female representation in your local music scene fill you with rage? Riot Grrrl would have definitely urged you to start a band and bring those girls to the front! DIY represented everything Riot Grrrl was and is.⁹⁹ Riot grrrls were notorious for taking a proactive approach. Riot grrrls did not sit around waiting for revolution they embodied the girl revolution they wanted to see reflected by the world they lived in, in all its dark corners. Or so they tried. Sara Marcus describes the DIY aspect of Riot Grrrl, arguing that

Creating something from nothing, fashion from garbage, music and art from whatever was nearest at hand, whether that be kazoos or ukuleles or strange garden implements on liquidation special down at the Yardbird's. DIY was a philosophy and a way of life, a touchstone that set its industrious adherents apart from the legions of Americans who passed their lives—as the punks saw it—trudging from TV set to first-run multiplex, from chain record store to commercial radio dial, treating art and culture as commodities to be consumed instead of vital forces to be struggled with and shaped, experimented with and created, breathed and lived.¹⁰⁰

The quote above is key to understanding the origins and general makeup of the Riot Grrrl movement and is crucial to understanding why Riot Grrrl continues to

⁹⁹ Riot Grrrl gained underground notoriety in 1992 and began to die out in 1995. Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, Print.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 37.

resonate in the hearts of many feminist punks today, regardless of race, age, class or sexuality.

Riot Grrrl was created to bring women's rights and interests to the forefront of political activism nationally and within the already highly politicized, broader punk scene. Since its formation in the 1970's, the local punk scene overall had been noticeably white and male-dominated. Riot Grrrl is in part a politically and emotionally charged collective response of mostly white American women and girls to the lack of options female show-goers had when it came to safe, inclusive, misogyny-free show spaces. Punk shows are not always safe, welcoming spaces for folks who are not white or male, despite questionable claims made by punks who were there for the formative years of punk.¹⁰¹ Their options were to either go to the show and risk getting punched in the face by a man twice their size or not go at all. The latter option is an unbearable fate for a kid who relies on these shows and the spaces they take place in for an escape from any number of things that eat away at the heart and hinder our ability to take flight.

¹⁰¹ Punks who have been in the scene for an extended period may want to maintain a utopic image of the "good old days" of the early punk scene. Refer to my analysis of paternalism in the punk scene in chapter 2 of this thesis for more. For further reading on paternalism and punk, see:

Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, "Chapter 2: Class-Based Theories of Popular Culture," *Counterpoints* 223 (2004): 15-40.

Exene Cervenka and John Doe of first wave L.A. punk band, "X", were asked about their opinions on diversity and inclusivity in the punk scene at Cornell University's "PunkFest Cornell: Anarchy in the Archives" conference. According to Cervenka, "punk rock was an incredibly universal, spontaneous thing" while her now ex-husband, Doe claimed "Beatniks taught white people how to talk Black", which simply put, is an indirect way of saying that Beatniks and punks have been coopting and appropriating Black culture since the very beginning. However, neither Cervenka nor Doe acknowledge/interpret this phenomenon as rooted in racism. Their responses are certainly reflective of an impression of the scene as seen through the eyes of two white people who happened to be romantically involved during the time period they referenced (1970's). Exene Cervenka later uses her relationship with Doe to explain why she did not witness misogyny in the scene, which I will analyze further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Exene Cervenka and John Doe, PunkFest, panel discussion, Cornell University, November 4, 2016.

I argue that Riot Grrrl's perception of a struggle for women's rights lacked nuance in the sense that it failed to facilitate a movement-wide conversation about inequality among WOMEN as well as men, therefore indicating its failure as a feminist movement. In bunching several different causes together under the same banner of punk rock "feminism", Riot Grrrl pushed the question of racism and its effect on society and women into the margins of its figurative list of grievances and concerns. For example, Queercore was a subgenre of punk with close ties to Riot Grrrl that held space for queer people. It took off in the U.S. at the exact same time as Riot Grrrl. Queercore bands and the queer folks who attended Queercore shows found a place to exist through the punk scene, and found support in Riot Grrrl as many Riot Grrrl bands and scenesters considered themselves to be a part of both scenes.¹⁰² There was a great deal of crossover between the two scenes.¹⁰³ Deanna Shoemaker writing about Queercore band, Tribe 8, argues

Although Tribe 8¹⁰⁴ favored an explicitly queer sexuality over many riot grrrl themes of eating disorders and oppressive beauty ideals, they did focus on issues of sexual violence against women, collaborated with riot grrrl band members, and promoted a DIY girl-centered culture. Thus, their musical performances must be read in within the principles and practices of riot grrrl culture as well as queercore.¹⁰⁵

Later in the same paper, Shoemaker quotes Tribe 8 member Slade Bellum, who claims that "There is a support network [of women] . . . we are connected with each

¹⁰² The Butchies and Bikini Kill for example, although the Butchies are remembered and celebrated as key artists of the Pacific-West Queercore scene in the 1990's.

¹⁰³ For more on the history of Queercore, see:

Deanna Shoemaker, "Queer Punk Macha Femme: Leslie Mah's Musical Performance in Tribe 8," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 295-306.

<https://www.out.com/entertainment/music/2012/04/12/history-queer-core-gay-punk-GB-JONES>

¹⁰⁴ Tribe 8 was a popular all-women Queercore band, which formed in 1990.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 298-299.

other and we're trying to help each other out. We're trying to do tours together, we're trying to connect with each other . . . and network on a lower level."¹⁰⁶ Bellum is referring to riot grrrls. Therefore, there is evidence that Riot Grrrl helped pave the way for a music scene deliberately for queer and gender non-conforming folks. Riot Grrrl enabled the Queercore scene to come to fruition by being one of the first punk scenes whose existence challenged the idea among white punks that the punk scene overall was a tolerant one, absolved from the criticism and scrutiny of its marginalized participants. While Riot Grrrl purposefully allowed for a space to be carved out for queer people, it did not appear to do the same for queer Black and Brown women who also wrestle with racism.¹⁰⁷ There were platforms for "all" women and platforms for queer women specifically but nothing to intentionally uplift Black and Brown women or create space to explore different racial identities. No one ever said "Black girls to the front", they just said "all" and that is simply not good enough or intentional enough (such as is Riot Grrrl's relationship with Queercore), especially when the call to action is coming via a movement of predominantly white women.¹⁰⁸

John Doe of "X" and innovator of early L.A. punk (circa 1977) described the punk scene, presumably during the period in which he was most active (late 1970's

¹⁰⁶ Andrea Juno, *Angry Women in Rock, Volume 1*, New York: Juno Books, 1996, p. 56, quoted in Deanna Shoemaker, "Queer Punk Macha Femme: Leslie Mah's Musical Performance in *Tribe 8*," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 299.

¹⁰⁷ The women of color of Queercore of the early to mid 1990's (the Riot Grrrl era) include but are hopefully not limited to Leslie Mah and Tantrum of *Tribe 8* and Alison Martlew of *The Butchies*.

¹⁰⁸ Latinos, West Indians and other diasporic Africans residing in the United States also live and breathe everyday occurrences of oppression and stigmatization due to their racial identity. Race is a complex construct with a painful history for Black Americans and those Brown Americans who trace their lineage back to enslavement and beyond. It is wiser and more useful in achieving a shared goal of equality to view feminism and comparable ideologies (i.e. queer rights movement) as a constant practice in self-awareness, self-examination, humility, empathy and understanding.

and 80's) as "75 percent white".¹⁰⁹ What of the other 25 percent? Where are they in the history books and how do the shortcomings of the music scholarship reflect this imbalance of representation? How does that imbalance perpetuate a false narrative that Black and Brown folks didn't make punk music because punk is perceived to be "white people music"?¹¹⁰ The idea that the punk scene, and Riot Grrrl by extension, is and has always been an all-inclusive scene is a common thread in the discourse and scholarship about punk however I argue that the truth is far more complicated than that. Riot Grrrl has proven to be one of my best examples of this falsehood.

Riot Grrrl came to be because female punks felt they had no choice but to carve out a safe space within the scene so they could be free from harassment in all its forms, and perhaps most importantly, heard and not just seen. The movement created a safer, more inclusive/accepting space that allowed for freedom of expression, a platform to discuss society's taboos as they impact the lives of women, and a degree of solidarity amongst society's angry youth, men included. Still, the movement was predominantly white, gaining traction on college campuses that were and continue to be overwhelmingly white.¹¹¹ Kathleen Hanna, vocalist of Riot

¹⁰⁹ John Doe, PunkFest, panel discussion, Cornell University, November 4, 2016.

PunkFest Cornell: Anarchy in the Archives was a conference I attended as a part of my research for this thesis. It took place at Cornell University from November 1-5, 2016. The main event of the conference was the unveiling of the University's new punk archival collection. The collection features materials and primary sources from each decade of punk's existence, beginning in the 1970's with Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's U.K. based punk clothing store, *Sex*. The new archive's most recent items date back to the 1990's, the decade punk broke into the mainstream with the rise of acts such as Green Day, Blink-182 and the Offspring, just to name a few.

¹¹⁰ Said every friend I ever had and every stranger I had the displeasure of meeting that did not personally enjoy or listen to punk music.

¹¹¹ According to the Evergreen State College website, in 2001, there were 354 white people, 18 Latinos, and 11 African Americans admitted and enrolled. 2001 is as far back as the College's online records go. In 2016, 15 years later, the school enrolled 381 white people, 69 Latinos, and 29 African Americans. Therefore, the racial make up of that college remains predominantly white, just as it was

Grrrl band, *Bikini Kill* came to Olympia, Washington from her hometown of Portland, Oregon to attend Evergreen State College where she took women and gender studies courses. She developed her political and feminist consciousness here in the sense that she wanted more than what the curriculum at her school had to offer her. She wanted to graduate from standard second wave texts such as *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir: 1949) and *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan: 1963), so she became the architect of her own special style of feminism. Apparently Hanna was not the only woman who felt that way because her style of feminism evolved and became known as Riot Grrrl.

Black and Brown women deserve better than the brand of feminism championed by white women which does not consider the “The Future is Female,” and “Sisterhood is Global” have failed to engage in activist work, which prioritizes race and condemns racism as the major threat to women’s rights that it is. Even the Women’s March on Washington DC of 2017, which drew the largest crowds of any women’s rights protests in United States history, failed intersectional feminists as protesters sported pink “pussy hats,” a political symbol for their feminism.¹¹² However, the hat is itself a representation of a vulva, which not all women have. This choice of symbolism (the pussy hat) therefore leaves trans women and non-binary identifying folks excluded from the effort, further pushing the idea that trans women

decades before. The very white environments that she moved between, at least in part, shaped Hanna’s politics and it was there in Olympia that Hanna formed her first band, *Bikini Kill*, with fellow Evergreen State attendees Tobi Vail and Kathi Wilcox.

<http://www.evergreen.edu/sites/default/files/ftfyapp-admit-enroll2001-16.pdf>

¹¹² Ashwini Tambe, “The Womens March on Washington: Words from an Organizer: An Interview with Mrinalini Chakraborty,” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 223.

<https://www.pussyhatproject.com>

aren't the target audience, the intended beneficiary of modern feminist activism.¹¹³ White women still have not done enough to use their privilege towards sharing the feminist movement with women of color. Nor have many put in enough effort to transform their feminism into something that is intersectional, nuanced, and self-aware all at once. They have systemically shut Black and Brown women out of important conversations and organizing efforts that could potentially have an effect on their human rights.¹¹⁴ This is why scholars of gender and race have created socio-political concepts like "Intersectionality" and "Womanism."¹¹⁵ Shutting us out has had severe consequences on the progress of the Women's Movement overall. While many strides have been made, modern white feminism continues to rest on a foundation of Black and Brown women's subjugation, just as patriarchy relies on the subjugation of anyone who isn't white or male to maintain itself. White feminism reinterprets and reiterates these power dynamics, positioning white women at the top of the hierarchy by default as they continue to erase women's differences, thus keeping us from moving forward socially. This erasure of important differences in relation to race, class, gender, ability, etc. continues to be the Achilles Heel of feminism and feminist organizing.

Riot Grrrl is representative of a space for passionately pissed off young girls

¹¹³ This is obvious transphobia. What this shows is that white feminists continue to do to other marginalized communities what they have always done to Black people, Black women especially. For more on this, refer to renowned trans-activist (and speaker at the Women's March on Washington of 2017) Janet Mock's take on the state of the feminist movement today, as it relates to trans women: <http://www.papermag.com/janet-mock-2440472774.html>

¹¹⁴ Beginning with the American suffrage movement of the early 20th century, during which many white women advocated for their own right to vote and expressed resentment towards Black men, who were given the right to vote before white women. See: <https://www.contentng.net/post/the-hypocrisy-of-white-feminism>

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of these concepts, refer to chapter 3 of this thesis.

to find their voices as well as the many exclusionary aspects of first and second wave feminism that have fallen under scrutiny from intersectionality theorists over the past several decades.¹¹⁶ One example is analyses of modern American society and gender dynamics that fail to consider the role race plays historically and presently in the life of a Black or Brown person in America.¹¹⁷ Riot Grrrl intended to provide the support, understanding and platform for ALL women and girls yet white riot grrrls failed to seriously engage with the differences between themselves and their Black and Brown counterparts, opting to focus only on shared experiences. Unfortunately, these shared experiences do not cover the full of experience of what it means to be Black or Brown in the United States. It is not enough to simply acknowledge that racism exists.¹¹⁸ Acceptance is merely the first step and it means nothing without action.

I was admittedly a little surprised to learn that according to Marcus, Vail and Hanna swapped texts that criticized and theorized the many complexities of race. “[Hanna] read the books Tobi lent her, and Tobi read the art theory and essays on white privilege that Kathleen gave to *her*, and gradually the two friends staked out common ground, arriving at a vision of a cool, accessible feminist movement that Tobi dubbed the Revolution Girl Style Now.” If the mothers of Riot Grrrl made a point to educate themselves on matters of race and feminism then why was this

¹¹⁶ See: bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, New York: Routledge, 1984.

Kum-Kum Bhavnani, *Feminism and "Race"*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹¹⁷ *Girls to the Front* is a good example of an analysis of gender that fails to apply a critical lens to the racist aspects of social constructs of gender. This is due to the fact that Marcus primarily emphasizes a broad spectrum of women's interests as well as the music scene attached to the Riot Grrrl movement. The members of Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, and Bratmobile, the aforementioned “holy trinity of Riot Grrrl,” are all white.

¹¹⁸ The texts Marcus claims Tobi lent Hanna included the works of critical race theorists such as bell hooks and Angela Davis (Marcus, 47-48).

understanding of the complexities and variation of the feminine experience not reflected in the Riot Grrrl scene overall, from the specific causes riot grrrls chose to rally around to the people dominating the music scene, doing the organizing, making the music and thus controlling the movement? I argue that this is a form of racism.

The Riot Grrrl Collection compiled by Lisa Darms also illuminates the ways that Riot Grrrl as a movement and community failed women of color. In one excerpt drawn from a zine called *Bikini Kill 2*, an anonymous riot grrrl writes,

People think of oppression as a test you can either pass or fail. Ok, you get one point for being poor, one more for being female, but oh no, you score a negative one for being white and able-bodied and..... I'm sorry but it just doesn't work that way... if organizing around my own issues is somehow wrong cuz there are other people who are in situations that are even more life damaging then me, then I am wrong.¹¹⁹

The aforementioned anonymous article is an example of a white woman's apprehension towards speaking about and against racism and is indicative of this larger phenomenon within Riot Grrrl. It exemplifies the ways white women make excuses for not engaging critically with race so that they can continue their apparent stance of not engaging.¹²⁰ The anonymous author is wrong because what she has described is in fact EXACTLY how oppression works. Oppression is the subordination of one group in order to uplift another to a place of power and the consequent silence that often goes hand in hand with possessing the privilege of

¹¹⁹ Darms, 140-141.

¹²⁰ As exemplified by Marcus' throwaway sentence acknowledging that pioneering white riot grrrls were aware of and supposedly inspired by intersectional feminist theory, and simultaneous failure to include in the book precisely how these white riot grrrls incorporated what they had learned into the actual philosophy of their movement (Riot Grrrl). This leads me as a fan and reader to believe that riot grrrls did not and do not always practice what they preach.

enjoying an elevated position in society.¹²¹ This is something that cannot and should not be ignored, especially in politicized subcultural communities such as Riot Grrrl that were attempting to address the needs of young women. I argue that this form of racism negates the chance for solidarity between white girls and girls of color. Claiming silence in the face of serious social and political injustices simply because one does not experience the injustice first hand, a privilege in and of itself, is the same as condoning it.¹²² The false notion of “colorblindness”,¹²³ a word used to describe one’s hesitation to acknowledge race as a factor in any occurrence no matter how minor or serious it is, does infinitely more harm than good in the fight for racial equality. Further, it illuminates a significant contradiction in ideology and grossly ignores the racial history, both political and musical, of cities like Washington DC that paved the way for future grassroots movements like Riot Grrrl to be semi-well received by the underground and mainstream America at once.¹²⁴

¹²¹ See: Audre Lorde, “There Is No Hierarchy of Oppressions”, *Bulletin: Homophobia and Education*, 14(3/4), 9, 1983.

¹²² For more on Riot Grrrl’s problem with race and racism, see: Addie Shrodes, *The ‘Race Riot’ Within and Without ‘The Grrrl One’; Ethnoracial Grrrl Zines’ Tactical Construction of Space*, Master’s thesis, University of Michigan, 2012.

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/why-i-was-never-a-riot-grrrl>
https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/9k99a7/alternatives-to-alternatives-the-black-grrrls-riot-ignored

¹²³ For more on “colorblindness” see:

Yolanda Abel and LeRoy Johnson, “The African American Saga from Enslavement to Life in a Colorblind Society: Or, Racism Without Race,” *Black History Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (2013): 26-30.

Jesse N. Curtis, “Remembering Racial Progress, Forgetting White Resistance: The Death of Mississippi Senator John C. Stennis and the Consolidation of the Colorblind Consensus,” *History and Memory* 29, no. 1 (2017): 134-60.

¹²⁴ Bad Brains is one of the most celebrated and respected hardcore punk bands to come out of the hardcore punk scene in Washington DC due to their ability to play at lightening speed and with relative skill which was rare for punk at the time. They also happen to be Black. They released their first album, *Black Dots*, in 1979 and have remained connected to the scene and continue to tour together as a band. Many hardcore punk acts of the 1980’s have cited Bad Brains as a major influence on their music and audiences went absolutely wild for their live sets because their high energy was unmatched in the scene at the time. They were nominated for induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2016, but lost the vote.

Ultimately I found myself looking for answers in the archives.

Diving in to NYU's *Riot Grrrl Collection* at the Fales Library, I was both troubled and inspired by what I found. White women and girls almost exclusively penned the articles I pulled from this archive, perhaps the largest, best executed and organized of its kind. Images of white girls and Kathleen Hanna with the word "slut" written across her stomach made up the bulk of primary sources I pulled from this collection. There was a noticeable absence of racial diversity in the recorded history of a movement whose anger, passion, and activism had inspired me so greatly as a teen. Heterosexual riot grrrls were champions for LGBT rights and supported the Queercore movement with fervor but racial equality apparently remained taboo, according to the materials that have been made available through the collection.

The L.A. Riots broke out in 1992, the same year that Riot Grrrl emerged. It is disappointing then that the incident, which inspired these riots did not at the same time inspire and light a fire within these young white feminist activists. It is not as though racism had been eradicated by that point in American history and was therefore unworthy of the same attention. If anything, it was amplified, made painfully clear by the intensity of the riots and the manner in which the media chose to cover them.¹²⁵ My research thus attempts to identify riot grrrls of color in the historical record who connected with the passionate anger and fierce resistance that Riot Grrrl was known for. I aim to address the holes in Sara Marcus' work by

¹²⁵ The L.A. Riots were a response to the barbaric beating of Rodney King, a Black man by white members of the LAPD. The incident was caught on tape and still, the offending officers were acquitted of their crime. According to the JSTOR Daily, the riots were the "largest civil disturbance in American history." <https://daily.jstor.org/why-rodney-king-video-conviction/>
<http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-riot-front-pages/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/may/01/la-riots-rodney-king-race>

highlighting the contributions of Black and Brown punks, reminding readers that “girls to the front” was a rallying cry for every girl, not just the white women who were present and that fact needs to be both acknowledged and studied.

Chapter II: The Underground

Sitting in the dirty old basement of AS220,¹²⁶ an art collective that doubles as a nightclub in the heart of downtown Providence, I think to myself that this is exactly what underground music should always feel like; raw, unpolished, loud and static yet harmonious and comforting. This is the underground, and not just because we're sublevel. Unloading my bag, pencils, recorder, books and beer onto the wobbly table top, chairs stacked to the ceiling, old sound equipment boxing us in, making the room seem smaller (there's a metaphor here somewhere), a faint noise in the distance hits my ears... *testing one, two, testing...* and the drummer kicks, shaking the foundation of the DIY venue.¹²⁷ It grows more aggressive and I'm getting excited because I can make out the drum pattern now as the drummer finds their rhythm. I'm feeling so many things at once: joy, excitement, and nervousness because whatever happens next will be completely unpredictable. I think about how, like the drummer upstairs, I too get to decide what will happen next on this journey of extracting Black and Brown women's voices from the margins of music history.

Scholars of punk music and history analyze the political impact of underground music scenes in the United States but fail to provide a critical analysis

¹²⁶ AS220 is a non-profit community art space founded in 1985. It is part bar, part art gallery and performance space.

¹²⁷ The walls of AS220 are covered in artwork. Behind me is a table where someone is selling band merchandise and taking donations for the South Dakota Pipeline protesters. The scene I've just described exemplifies DIY in that those I shared the space with that night were all there to either get or give something away. The bands that played blessed us with their music; breaking people open emotionally through performance. Merch vendors find a place to be, in hopes that someone will buy something from the band (a t-shirt, album, or show flyer), enabling the musicians to continue touring or have some dinner that night. The oral history that I conducted with Victoria Ruiz was one of the greatest nights of my life to date. Whether its emotional release, camaraderie, or infamy, which one can certainly achieve in the underground due to its intimate nature. No one waits to be given the thing they desire most. Punks do not hesitate to seek these things out or create them out of nothing. They just fucking do it. Spaces like AS220 make this sort of action a reality. DIY forever.

of gendered and racial dynamics and the ways they play out in the scene. This is part of why I am here to interview Ruiz. Plenty of folks are drawn to the punk underground because it is local by definition and easily accessible in more ways than one. Much like what hip hop did for Black and Brown low-income communities, the punk scene provides an environment where Black and Brown youth can gather, express and share art in the form of music.¹²⁸ History tells us that the mistreatment of people of African descent began with chattel slavery, an economic system with deep social and cultural ties. Chattel slavery is the practice of buying and selling Black bodies for the purpose of exploiting their labor for profit. Forced reproduction was common under slavery in order to sustain the system in place.¹²⁹ The institution of slavery has had severe everlasting effects on modern American society, which scholars have begun referring to as the “new racism”.¹³⁰ The scholarship has provided important statistics, which show that African Americans make up the majority of those incarcerated in the United States despite the fact that African Americans make up just 13.3% of the American population.

According to the Sentencing Project, a non-profit based in Washington DC, “Between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 700%, rising from a total of 26,378 in 1980 to 222,061 in 2014.” Despite a reported decrease in the imprisonment rate of Black women and an increase in the

¹²⁸ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aKuTB-T-yo>

¹²⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

¹³⁰ See:
 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism*, Routledge, 2005.
 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, 2010.

rate of white women, there remain twice as many Black women in prison than white women.¹³¹ The fact that these figures fail to reflect the true make up of the American population, that there is an overwhelming disproportion of Black women/girls to white women/girls in our prisons, despite there being far more white people in this country than Black folks is evidence of widespread institutional racism. It also reflects the many ways that this form of racism plays out in modern American society.¹³²

Underground music scenes serve as a safe place where Black and Brown women, painfully aware of these threats to both the psyche and their safety, can potentially be surrounded by like-minded folks, and pursue emotional output in a healthy, controlled way. Underground scenes are useful in this way for providing a channel to address anger without having to resort to violence, the same violence that plagues our communities and takes on many forms from police brutality and the over-policing of our neighborhoods to gentrification.

The music itself is another aspect that makes the underground accessible. Punk music is simple, stripped down and emotionally charged. The message behind the music is within our grasp because we are members of the scene and residents of the locality the scene exists in. It is local and easy to find if one only seeks it out. Some folks enjoy visiting their local shopping center for a social experience, meeting

¹³¹ Source: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf>

¹³² Michelle Alexander, civil rights litigator and legal scholar writes, “the racial bias inherent in the drug war is a major reason that 1 in every 14 black men was behind bars in 2006, compared with 1 in 106 white men. For young black men, the statistics are even worse. 1 in 9 black men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five was behind bars in 2006, and far more were under some form of penal control—such as probation or parole. These gross racial disparities simply cannot be explained by rates of illegal drug activity among African Americans.” For further reading, see: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 100.

up with friends, sharing a meal, etc. Some seek out creative communities such as underground music scenes where they can be supported and encouraged to express themselves in whatever form they choose. The underground is ideally¹³³ a judgment-free zone that provides positive affirmation in the sense that, through the scene, one has the opportunity to situate themselves around others also seeking a creative outlet and a community to safely do that in. Because of this, the underground can feel much like a second home, perhaps more comforting and nurturing than one's actual home.

Underground musicians and artists are often locals too. This is a bond shared between the artist and the audience, one that cannot be manufactured, only felt and formed by being present and active within one's local scene. Face to face interactions and accessibility of the music itself help foster community.¹³⁴

Victoria Ruiz is the front-woman of the band Downtown Boys, an underground punk act based in Providence, Rhode Island. I had the distinct pleasure of conducting an oral history with Ruiz in December 2016. I stayed for the show afterwards as well, which was an experience in and of itself. Ruiz shared a story with me about an outdoor show Downtown Boys played in Portland, Oregon. A young boy who she guessed was around 4 or 5 years old made his way to the front of the stage and began dancing to the music. Ruiz spoke to the boy's father after the show when he informed her that he brought his son over after realizing that she was singing in Spanish. Ruiz's recollection highlights the unifying power of language,

¹³³ Emphasis on "ideal."

¹³⁴ Underground artists frequently weave their own personal histories in with musings of life in the "hood" or the neighborhood they grew up in, and that which provides a budding music scene with a place to take root.

words, and representation. She elaborated, (considering that the man and his son would probably not have taken an interest in her band in the absence of that linguistic connection), “There’s no way he would have come to check out this punk thing”¹³⁵ if Downtown Boys had not been writing or singing in Spanish. Ruiz’s comments also speak to the possibility of some folks not being particularly drawn to punk music but still enjoying what they hear because of the language in which it is sung. I personally was drawn to Downtown Boys as a punk fan and for the purpose of this thesis not only because of the women in the band but because it struck me that they were an American punk band in 2016 performing for Spanish speakers. I interpreted this choice to be a rejection of all rhetoric, which would discourage and condemn the cultural diversity that this country owes its wealth and power to. For me, Downtown Boys’ songs in Spanish are as much political as they are personal, a reflection of who we are as people, who I am, a tangible attempt to keep normalizing/recognizing our presence in this country and in this music scene. As a punk, both Brown and femme, that was powerful. Downtown Boys’ use of Spanish also bridges the gap between punk music and those who might have dismissed punk because they associate it exclusively with the community of freaks and weirdos it came out of.¹³⁶ It also bridges the gap between American punk and the scores of Latinos across Latin America keeping the spirit of punk alive through their local scenes.¹³⁷ Approaching or attempting to gain access into spaces like this can be

¹³⁵ Victoria Ruiz, Interviewed by Courtney Aucone, AS220, Providence, Rhode Island, December 11, 2016.

¹³⁶ There are numerous reasons why different people do not enjoy punk music. This is merely the reason I have encountered most often. Some folks simply don’t like the sound of it.

¹³⁷ See: David A. Ensminger, “When La Raza And Punk Rock Collude And Collide: Hispanics in Punk and Hardcore,” In *Visual Vitriol: The Street Art and Subcultures of the Punk and*

intimidating and scary for a newcomer which is why a thing like shared language makes a music scene that much more accessible.

Ruiz argues that music has the potential power to unify communities and bring people together physically and mentally.

We have a new song, the chorus is “somos chulas no somos pendejas”¹³⁸ and our bassist, she’s Mexican... this whole thing “she’s Brown, she’s smart”... I think it really resonates with her. She grew up speaking Spanish, her parents only speak Spanish, and so I think it does resonate with people and it does help [us] connect with more people. I think it’s also gone the other way where, not so much now because we’re so vocal, but when we were getting a little bit more mainstream press, a lot of the writers either didn’t care about the songs that were in Spanish or tried to make them more than what they were like they’re just songs in a language that’s spoken by millions of people in the US.¹³⁹

Downtown Boys’ bilingual performances also present an opportunity for a wider audience to take an interest in the music, and hopefully gain the courage to show up to the space; whether as a fan or musician, showing up is half of the battle. While ideally a place of acceptance, punk DIY spaces can simultaneously be intimidating, perpetuating a cooler/punker-than-thou mentality.¹⁴⁰ Further, when local Black and Brown kids discover a band like Downtown Boys, they may feel connected to the music in a way that they might not have felt otherwise, had those lyrics not been so relatable and accessible, in a language they grew up speaking at

Hardcore Generation, 214-41, University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
 Marissa López, “¿Soy Emo, Y Qué? Sad Kids, Punkera Dykes and the Latin@ Public Sphere,” *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 04, November 31, 2012: 895-918.

Kelley Tatro, “The Hard Work of Screaming: Physical Exertion and Affective Labor Among Mexico City’s Punk Vocalists,” *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 3, 2014: 431.

¹³⁸ Translates to “We’re cute, we’re not dumb”.

¹³⁹ Victoria Ruiz, Interviewed by Courtney Aucone, AS220, Providence, Rhode Island, December 11, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Later in our interview, Ruiz spoke to this point, describing the scene’s paternalistic tendencies. Punks who have been involved in the scene for a long time may feel as though they possess a greater claim to the cultural capital that is created through it. For more on this, refer to page 62 of this thesis.

home and in their comfort zone.¹⁴¹ Downtown Boys show us that the rage and pain associated with punk music is relatable across the boundaries of race and class, in spite of or perhaps because of its more aggressive, noisy and emotionally charged elements.

When Downtown Boys chose to make music in Spanish, whether they intended this or not, they opened up a space that others might step into, potentially inspiring young folks of color to become involved in the scene and hopefully with the music-making.¹⁴² Language makes it easier to get sucked into the magical subculture that is punk. In time, doing so could shift some of the things that people associate with punk subculture, such as whiteness, hyper-masculinity, and skinhead culture. When people have a shared value, idea, feeling (or language) to rally behind, they may choose to come together as a community with shared interests to confront those feelings. Anger is one such feeling.

While the history of punk in the United States dictates that punk subculture of the American variety spawned from white suburban boredom,¹⁴³ the subjects of

¹⁴¹ Providence boasts a significant Latino population. According to the Pew Research Center, a Washington D.C.- based think tank, Latinos make up approximately 13 percent of the state's population, making Rhode Island the state with the twelfth highest Latino population in the country. (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/ri/>). Unfortunately, as an aspect of structural racism, the United States has a long history of disrespecting and violating Black and Brown Spanish speakers. For one of the best modern examples of this phenomenon, see every comment the 45th president has ever made about Mexico and Spanish speaking immigrants. Start here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p78JMn2na9A>

¹⁴² In our interview, Ruiz appeared frustrated by those (white people) who have interviewed her in the past and asked questions about this subject. She reminded me that Spanish is a language spoken by millions across the globe, giving away her sense of urgency in having the world remember that fact. She doesn't want to be painted as special for singing in Spanish. Rather, she wants our languages to be treated and respected as the norm that they are. According to the Census Bureau's 2017 statistics, approximately 21,172,098 Americans over the age of 18 speak Spanish. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_S1601&prodType=table

¹⁴³ For more on this, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

the oral histories I have either conducted or used in my research of this thesis hail from thriving local scenes based in major cities. Ruiz describes the current punk scene in Providence

The punk scene [in Providence] is definitely not monolithic. There's many smaller scenes and bigger punk scenes. There was a really big band called Lightning Bolt in Providence that was sort of the leader of the DIY scene and they built a lot of punk show spaces and studios and residences in old buildings and most of the mills were rented, some of them were leased, some of them were squatted in so they kind of used all of the old mill buildings because Rhode Island is home to the first mill. There's this place called Slater Mill in Pawtucket. There used to be, not so much now, but there used to be a feminist art exhibit at Slater Mill and all the art had to do with Rhode Island history, mill history, and protest history and there used to be a really amazing tour about the connection [between] the slave trade and the mills. All of those mills are just such a huge part of, you know, what happens today, and so a lot of the punk scene came out of that.¹⁴⁴

Ruiz's comments speak to the ways local communities utilize physical spaces and DIY tradition. They also reveal an understanding of the unique local history behind the punk scene she belongs to. Regarding the state of the Providence scene today, Ruiz claims

There's [currently] a punk scene of younger people, younger than I am,¹⁴⁵ in their very early twenties who are born and raised in Providence and really just wanna shred, they just wanna play punk music so there's a lot of different micro-scenes. And since it's so small I think that a lot of people of color who do art it doesn't really matter whether we do punk or we do rap or poetry or visual arts, we all kind of end up knowing each other and we all end up kind of playing the same shows and things like that so that's really cool. *

While punk music, ideology and culture in general is a product of DIY practices, there is a more negative side to maintaining a music scene or any kind of subcultural

¹⁴⁴ According to its website, Slater Mill is "the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution". (<http://www.slatermill.org/home2/history/>). The mill was erected in 1793 and remains in Pawtucket ever since. It served as a cotton factory throughout the 19th century and was/is thus a notable fixture of the slave labor industry in New England.

¹⁴⁵ Ruiz is in her late twenties.

*Ruiz's comments included in this thesis have been taken from either a Skype exchange we had in November 2016 or the oral history we conducted in December 2016, unless otherwise cited.

movement in these conditions. Ruiz continues with her discussion of the mill scene in Providence

VR: Yeah well the big [mill] that kind of started it all was Fort Thnder, and then, with no “U” it’s like t-h-n-d-e-r, Fort Thnder, but um we actually, a bunch of people and Downtown Boys we had a mill space that was also a show space called Spark City and if you look up Spark City we have a Tumblr where we post every single show and we got evicted by the landlord and that was really sad. They evicted us and then they basically just rented out our spot to drug dealers who could pay a lot more. That was a really sad eviction.

CA: That’s terrible but I imagine that happens a lot.

VR: It does and I think that with, like when you exist in like an informal thing, you know....

Ruiz trails off but the moral of the story is that the informality of the punk scene poses its own set of challenges. In reference to Providence-based micro scenes, punks carve out pieces of the scene to better suit their needs and comfort zones. For example, younger scenesters will book shows featuring more young punks if it means creating a safer space for themselves and youths like them to enjoy. Micro-scenes manifest so that people can continue to connect with one another. When one finds their place in the subculture, they want to continue connecting as much as possible and so collaboration ensues. It is the exact same concept as when an individual goes off to school or college and seeks out anybody with similar experiences and interests to connect with. This can also be seen when folks of color enter an unfamiliar space and gravitate naturally towards one another. Ruiz’s oral history highlights the tenuousness of underground spaces. In regards to the mill eviction, punks are constantly taking root and being uprooted.¹⁴⁶ When there is no

¹⁴⁶ It also highlights the danger capitalism poses to DIY spaces and underground communities. Ruiz’s comments exemplify the way landlords take advantage of what might have been considered fringe at the time for capital gain, whether it be punk or the distribution of illegal substances. This is another reason why DIY is so important. DIY represents the ability to break things up and start again.

steady source of income or stable monetary contribution from the youth who occupy these spaces, eviction may be inevitable. The music keeps us linked in ways that location often cannot, which marks another important aspect of underground music scenes.¹⁴⁷

Downtown Boys shake up the status quo that exists within the punk community, which already endeavors to subvert societal norms, making them doubly radical and important for the future of punk. While white punks may have been ideologically divergent from the social norm Black and Brown punks are not just different because their politics were considered radical for the times or because they rejected the status quo. Black and Brown punks literally wear their differences through their skin. They can alter their style of dress, spike their hair and don heavy dark make up but they can never stop being Black and Brown in a scene dominated by white people. Downtown Boys are rewriting punk history in real time, challenging racist and sexist notions of who belongs and who does not. They push both the scene and music industry to face the fact that Black and Brown punks are here. In addition, they have much to add to the political conversation that has on numerous occasions gone hand in hand with punk music since the Sex Pistols rocked the UK with their messy protest tunes and X-Ray Spex smashed the scene with a brick of feminine teenaged angst in the 1970's.¹⁴⁸ Ruiz and Downtown Boys

¹⁴⁷ Technological leaps also ushered in changes to certain aspects of the underground. Unlike first and second wave punks, punks today have social media at their disposal, enabling them to pass information more efficiently and effectively than ever before. Punks need not wait for another issue of their local zine to be printed in order to access new information about the scene as it comes. Show dates and even music can be shared in an instant through online platforms such as Twitter and Bandcamp, a website that allows signed and independent artists alike to post, share, and sell their music. See: <http://sparkcityprovidence.tumblr.com>

¹⁴⁸ For further reading on the current state of activism among punks of color, see:

highlight a crucial reason why this thesis is important. Black and Brown punks have our own experiences that impact how we interact with the scene. Because of this, we deserve care and attention in both the scholarship and music journalism regarding punk. We've been here and we are not checking out anytime soon.

Zines

Fanzines are another important component of the underground. In the most basic of terms, fanzines are the primary channel through which punks and members of the underground in general pass messages, ideas, opinions, and music-related information to one another. They are both affordable and highly accessible. According to Tricia Henry, author of *Break All Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, "It is this aspect of fanzines -- that they offer an insider's view of the punk world -- that makes them so valuable as a research tool for the historian."¹⁴⁹ By another definition, "[Fan]zines are noncommercial, nonprofessional, small circulation magazines that their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves."¹⁵⁰ The author of this quote goes on to make some provocative assessments, claiming that those who produce zines are often privileged, white-middle class youth wanting to be heard. I interpret this to be a critique of the accessibility of resources that are more readily available to the privileged (white).¹⁵¹

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/music/05-12-2017/punk-is-a-moving-target-downtown-boys-21st-century-protest-music/>

<http://www.antigravitymagazine.com/2015/10/cynthia-connelly-photographing-d-c-punks-salad-days/>

<http://shotgunseamstress.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-best-of-black-punk-rock-in-my.html>

Shotgun Seamstress in its entirety is one of the greatest sources in existence for knowing your punk rock history. It is a blog for and by Black punks.

¹⁴⁹ Henry, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Using the state of Rhode Island as an example of how entire neighborhoods are made to go

Because underground scenes are so beloved for their cultural and nostalgic value and close ties to the localities they spring from by members of the scene, one's authenticity and punk credibility is often questioned/challenged by older or more established scenesters. Scenes and subculture provide people with a community. The location of said community establishes a shared personal history among members, which creates a sense of belonging, purpose and a powerful reason to remain connected to art and others. Punks pride themselves on remaining authentically punk and keeping those traditions alive and pure. Maintaining the punk scene's authenticity is of the highest priority, otherwise it risks its credibility, which is really all one has as far as value in an informal subculture. Therefore, members of underground music scenes who enjoy a sense of credibility within the scene for various reasons (longevity, dedication, an active and consistent presence, etc.) may position themselves as gatekeepers, assuming authority over who has access to the scene and its limited resources. Paternalistic scenesters may feel an obligation to protect the scene from "posers" who attempt to gain access to it because of its cool novelty, magnetic attitude, and rising popularity. Original punks may feel as though they are defending the sanctity of the punk spirit and tradition by identifying and weeding out those posing as dedicated fans of the music. This so called paternalism has created at times a culture of hostility, suspicion or weariness of newcomers, which can be off-putting for those genuinely looking to get involved

without while others receive the bulk of the aid, see this document from the Rhode Island Association of School Communities that breaks down the history of financial aid allocated to the public school system: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/Funding-Sources/State-Education-Aid-Funding-Formula/FundingFormulaWorkingGroup/TimothyCDuffy-01.pdf>

and aren't simply looking for credibility in relation to the latest trend. Paternalism can also breed hostility among already established members of the scene due to the fact that there are scenesters who disagree with this gate-keeping approach.

Ruiz claims that paternalism in the scene or "gatekeeping" was a major reason behind her choice to relocate and pursue her musical interests in Providence instead of New York City. After noting her frustration with NYC's gentrification problem, which has been ongoing for several decades, Ruiz states, "I think that a lot of people have been displaced out of New York into Rhode Island so there's a giant Latino population now and really big [community] of color here and the music scene has always had these opportunities since there are so few people here [in Providence]. It's like you can be here for a few months and then suddenly start booking shows. It's not as paternalistic as other punk scenes so I think that was a big reason why I stayed." I would also add that folks might claim that underground music scenes are prejudice and judgment free zones (ideally, at least), but no one ever claimed that they are spaces free of ego, as exemplified by Exene Cervenka and John Doe's comments at PunkFest 2016 in chapter 1 of this thesis.

Another notable aspect of the accessibility of punk music is the fact that anyone can learn to play entire sets in a few hours or less due to punk's minimalist and devil-may-care roots. In punk there is no pressure to be classically trained or perfect in any way. You don't even have to be good. All you need is an instrument, often secondhand, ample passion (rage) and a desire to belong to something cool and cutting edge. To this point, Ruiz comments

Some people think that with Latino music [for example] you have to pay like 35 dollars and go sit in a really nice venue and listen to really beautiful,

inspired music and that's somehow authentic, and like, Latinos playing rock or Latinos playing punk or Latinos playing jazz is somehow not authentic, which is the exception to the rule and there's like, a lot of erasure. But if you look at... I mean all over the country Latinos have always played punk music. And I think that a big reason why I got into it is I got really into Tijuana No!,¹⁵² and Los Prisioneros,¹⁵³ and seeing Spanish lyrics, or seeing women of color, like X-Ray Spex or The Bags,¹⁵⁴ Alice Bag,¹⁵⁵ and just being like 'Oh wow we've been everywhere and we are everywhere'...

For Ruiz personally, the punk scene felt like a perfect fit for her, admitting that she struggles to learn instruments and lacks basic rhythm. "You don't have to have good rhythm to be a good punk musician. And I think that's also part of why I ended up in it. I think that if I had really good rhythm I'd probably want to go into Jazz but I just don't have good rhythm."¹⁵⁶ Ruiz continues, noting that

You're doing this music thing all to talk about your ancestry, the status quo and the past and the future and all for those one or two people of color who come to the show and they're just like... they get really touched by it. But you're at odds with markers of success that white people have forced down even my own family's line of thinking. So I'm constantly at odds.

It came as no surprise that Ruiz named Alice Bag as one of her musical heroes during the oral history. Not only do they have the same music distributor¹⁵⁷ but also

¹⁵² Tijuana No! was a punk/ska/reggae band based in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. They formed in 1989 and disbanded in 2002. In its thirteen year lifespan, Tijuana No! had two female lead vocalists, Julieta Venegas and Cecilia Bastida, although almost every member of the band provided vocals. According to the band's official Facebook page, "The group is known for its socially conscious lyrics, making references to the social and political issues they face both nationally and internationally. The group especially emphasizes the impact California's immigration policies have on the border [of Mexico]." [Translated from Spanish]. Ska is a fusion of punk and reggae, originating in Jamaica.

¹⁵³ Los Prisioneros are a Chile-based punk band with a wide influence.

¹⁵⁴ The Bags were original players in the first wave of L.A. based punk, which began to form circa 1977. They are firmly situated as one of the more prominent bands, credited as foremothers and fathers of L.A.'s early underground scene. (<http://alicebag.com/about/>)

¹⁵⁵ Alice Bag was front woman of the Bags. Bag is an author, educator, feminist and activist in addition to being one of the most important figures in early underground punk. Her website makes a great resource for anyone looking to research or get to know more about the legacy of women in the L.A. underground punk scene. See: <http://alicebag.com/women-in-la-punk/>

¹⁵⁶ Victoria Ruiz, Transcript of an oral history conducted in 2016, Interview by Courtney Aucone.

¹⁵⁷ Alice Bag is signed to the Don Giovanni imprint, the same label that released Downtown Boys' second album *Full Communism* in 2015.

lyrically, their music tackles the subjects of identity, racism and misogyny. Bag has a song on her latest release, *Blueprint* (2018), called “White Justice.” In the song, Bag sings

Black clubs, blue collars
 Blood red, silver dollars
 You say justice is colorblind
 I know you're lying
 I know you're lying
 White justice doesn't work for me

This bold reference to police brutality and racist policing is one of numerous examples of Bags’ undertaking of controversial political subjects. Intersectionality has been a common theme in Bags’ body of work, a feat Downtown Boys would later try to emulate. Ruiz’s comments perhaps make our presence in the current underground community seem infinitesimal and Ruiz’s own impact seem minor. Though in reality, those one or two Brown kids in a crowd of 15 on a good night gathering before a stage full of Brown kids (who are quickly making the leap from local to national favorites) is important, just as discovering the Bags was pivotal for Ruiz. Seeing oneself represented anywhere is powerful and affirmative and can change the course of someone’s life in an instant. Seeing yourself represented in your local scene is just like that.

Ruiz’s comments also illuminate the false dichotomy between being Latina and punk. Punk gives us permission as Black and Brown women to be complicated and to seek out success in life on our own terms and in our own time. It pushes us to be audacious enough to know that what we do is respectable, necessary and important even if people disagree. It grants us the chance to work through the complexities and contradictions of our identities in a way that is messy and

imperfect. Individuality is absolutely celebrated and rewarded in the punk scene.¹⁵⁸

However, how a person identifies in life and in their communities can present challenges from both sides, within the scene and at home.

I think people in my family are confused about what I'm doing. And when they talk to me it's clear that... its not like when we plays shows I'm endangered via drugs or alcohol or anything like that. And I have a community and I care about all of these political things and it's very confusing. But I think that's just because ideas of what we should be doing are so driven by these colonial thoughts.

Ruiz then discusses the reasons why she feels an attachment and responsibility to continue contributing to the art and culture that keeps her scene alive

A lot of my friends have very successfully gone from doing music to having really good full-time jobs, or going to law school or graduate school and to be very frank with you, I kind of want that. I wish I could do it but I *can't*, it's too much. I can't! There's just too many people who come to the shows and just connect and I just feel like I have to be doing this.

Ruiz describes this visceral aspect of belonging to a music scene. A symbiotic relationship exists between performer and show-goer, which everyone stands to benefit from. Anyone who truly loves their scene and wants to see it thrive plays a special role in keeping this relationship alive because they understand that without it, America's rejects would be left without their haven and home. The underground is home. She also demonstrates a keen awareness of how "colonial thoughts" and values continue to impact even the lives of those actively attempting to resist and abolish them.

During our oral history, Ruiz's voice grew progressively louder and firmer at

¹⁵⁸ With things like respect and infamy.

the point of mentioning those contemporaries who have gone on to pursue careers outside of the punk scene. Ruiz's delivery is similar to the way she delivers politically motivated messages between songs off the cuff. Downtown Boys' live performances stand out for the way they use these live performances as a platform for forging a political discussion. When Ruiz is onstage and building energy, excited by her own politically charged protest chants, which force their way from her chest with palpable fervor, the audience responds accordingly, matching the output of energy like a call and response. As it rises, so does that of the crowd and they become a reflection of each other. It is almost like a perfect harmony in the most grimy, sloppy, disgusting way imaginable. This is why performance is such a crucial component of the underground punk experience. It exemplifies how interconnected the emotion and aggression of live stage performances are to some of our most intense lived experiences. When we bear witness to them, we are given the rare opportunity to confront and release them. In the case of Downtown Boys in particular, Black and Brown members of the audience are able to consider, respond, and release the damage done by a society, and a scene that reflects that society despite its best efforts, that would leave Black and Brown folks doubly marginalized in this way. Ruiz makes a strong point about this,

And then the other way that people kind of don't accept us is we're just ignored. So [for example] the only alternative print magazine left in Providence is called Motif Mag. We've never once been mentioned in Motif Mag. We've been mentioned in Rolling Stone, CNN, the New York Times, the Providence Journal and we've never been in that shit once. And all they cover is alternative music.

She then proclaims, "the climate of where [they as a band] exist [has] multiple identities in Providence [laughter] depending on who you talk to so that's pretty

hard.” Ruiz continues her discussion of authenticity and paternalism in the scene stating that

There are a lot of people who kind of think that that was, you know, the most punk time [referring to the previously mentioned Slater Mill era] and that it's over and that it's kind of like time to move on and then there are a bunch of us who came at the very end of that and worked to continue something.

The punk scene of the Slater Mill era clearly blossomed into a socially and politically enlightened music and art scene, which purposefully makes space for Black and Brown youth to be the artist, the scenester/community member, or both at once. According to Motif Magazine's website, “Motif Magazine is dedicated to the arts and entertainment in Rhode Island and surrounding areas.”¹⁵⁹ There are several possible reasons regarding why a local Rhodie band like Downtown Boys might have been overlooked time and again by the state's most well-known local arts magazine. It could be that punk is known for being simplistic and thus gets a reputation for lacking nuance, sophistication, and respect. Perhaps others would rather not see young women on stage getting loud about things like white supremacy and misogyny. Or it could be that by appearing in *Rolling Stone Magazine* multiple times, *Motif Magazine* has deemed them unfit to represent Rhode Island's local underground art scene.¹⁶⁰ Paternalistic indeed.

In her concluding remarks, Ruiz maintains that Downtown Boys is still an authentically underground (read non-mainstream) band despite the amount of press and media attention they have been receiving

¹⁵⁹ MotifRI.com/about

¹⁶⁰ The idea of achieving a level of success that exposes one to wider audiences and usually involves some sort of record deal with a major label is widely known in the punk community as “selling out.” Selling out is also marked by a shift in attitude and a fading loyalty and connection to the local.

We still play really small shows. We're constantly trying to play with other underground bands. Ultimately, we work so hard to play live music. A lot of really amazing bands that I know don't tour as much as we do and they receive as much if not more accolades than we ever do and we're just so dedicated to touring. I think that as long as we're so dedicated to the "IRL", the "in real life" space, I think we'll be an underground band.

The underground has represented many things to many people. It has been a temporary escape and a permanent home, a place of conflict and resolution. Every music scene reflects a society that is simultaneously breaking and rebuilding itself over and over again. We need the scene for its music and community. There are no exceptions to this rule. Support your local scene.

Chapter III: “Somos Chulas, No Somos Pendejas”: Negotiating Femininity and Power in the Underground¹⁶¹

This chapter addresses the ways Black and Brown women who make punk music work through obstacles as a result of their gender and sexuality within their respective music scenes. It considers the discrepancies in the volume of scholarship that is inclusive of Black and Brown musicians, and that which fails to mention them altogether. I argue that when the scholarship leaves our stories and experiences out of the historical narrative, it feeds into the notion that we weren't and aren't present in past and existing underground punk scenes. The scholarship does not reflect the intersecting identities of so many punks, and our stories have been omitted from the historical record.¹⁶² Further, it perpetuates an understanding of our places as women in music scenes dominated by men that we are less accomplished, talented or deserving of the respect of our fellow scenesters.

Throughout much of human history, the word pioneer has often been associated with men. In punk rock history, the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, Green Day, and Rancid for example are placed on an obvious pedestal. Patti Smith and Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie and the Banshees are the exceptions in the punk rock scholarship and lay history books in that their stories have at least received some critical attention. These bands thus hold power in the punk community because history credits the works of the aforementioned punks as the root and reason for punk and

¹⁶¹ The title for this chapter was drawn from a Downtown Boys lyric, which translates to “we’re cute, we’re not dumb.”

¹⁶² The Washington State University archive “Women Who Rock Oral History Collection” is an exception to this rule. I am indebted to this project for being one of the few sources I was able to find, which focused specifically on compiling an archival collection of oral accounts that highlight the achievements and personal histories of some of my greatest musical sheroes such as Alice Bag of legendary LA-based punk band “The Bags.”

its eventual mainstream success. Patti Smith has several biographies in print yet I failed to find a single publication on the life and achievements of Poly Styrene. Fortunately, Styrene's daughter Celeste Bell is doing the good work of ensuring that her mother's legacy is noted and respected in the history. She is doing this through her involvement with an upcoming documentary about Styrene's life called "Poly Styrene: I Am A Cliché."¹⁶³ She is also co-authoring a biography about Styrene's life.¹⁶⁴ The discrepancy is apparent in the amount of attention paid to the men who have contributed to punk and that, which is given to women pioneers like Patti Smith.¹⁶⁵ Styrene, while considered a pioneer among punks, is given far less consideration in the historical scholarship and scholarship in general than her white female counterparts. Styrene is even scarcer in the scholarship, which explores music's relationship with gender and the structures in place, which allow our presence and contributions to be overlooked.

Part of the basis of this gap in literature and recognition is the fact that society continues to impose double standards for women. Society historically and presently sets impossible standards on women, attempting to police and control the ways women express and present themselves both publicly and privately.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Paul Sng will be directing the film. There is an INDIEGOGO campaign that is still live after having met its fundraising goal. The film has yet to be released.

https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/poly-styrene-i-am-a-cliche?utm_source=affiliate&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=sasdeep&utm_content=link&sscid=b1k2_im1pu#/

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/film-2/poly-styrene-punk-documentary/>

¹⁶⁵ I discuss this further on page 32 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁶ Examples include the perceived immodesty of exposed bra straps and nipples. They also include pressures to repress negative emotions such as anger because women are expected to look happy and be as agreeable as possible, unlike their male counterparts.

See: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Womens Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. New York, 2005.

Therí A. Pickens, "Shoving Aside the Politics of Respectability: Black Women, Reality TV, and the

Further, society's idea of femininity is rigid, with little tolerance for deviation. This is comparable and can be applied to the ways women are treated in hip hop and its corresponding body of scholarship. Women musicians are rarely taken seriously for the creativity and intelligence necessary to make art with mass appeal. Azealia Banks, a Harlem-based rapper exemplifies this fact. Banks has released album after album of well-received music, doing so with unmeasured style and individuality, yet the hip hop industry, which includes those who write about hip hop and its history, continues to treat her like a pariah.¹⁶⁷ In the scholarship, women musicians generally get more recognition as singers than as serious musicians and vehicles of the genre's success. In Styrene's case, she wasn't even granted this much.

Considering what I discussed in the previous chapter as important characteristics of underground music scenes,¹⁶⁸ it should be stated that Black and Brown women have been expressing themselves through various musical forms for many centuries. The redirection of their anger and frustration, a result of the oppression they experience due to race, gender, and sometimes class, I argue, is in part a defense mechanism that enables them to release the energy that has built up and festered. The emotional energy I'm speaking of takes many forms. It is the knot in your throat when you withhold tears, the overwhelming and often unexpected urge to become physically violent, lose control, lash out, and any and all other forms of outward emotional expression. It is the residue and buildup of everyday life, from unwelcome attention from strange men, catcalls, to both overt racism and the less

Ratchet Performance", *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 2014.

¹⁶⁷See: <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2017/07/azealia-banks-interview-music-industry/>
<https://uproxx.com/hiphop/azealia-banks-cardi-b-colorism/>

¹⁶⁸ See chapter 2 of this thesis.

obvious microaggressions.¹⁶⁹ It includes all of the unnecessary commentary where racial, religious, or gender identification is either the butt of the joke or the object of unwarranted scrutiny and criticism. Every day, Black and Brown women live these experiences and carry them until they find release, if they find release.¹⁷⁰

For the average Black and Brown woman working a 9-5 job or several, raising children perhaps, collecting public assistance to survive,¹⁷¹ pursuing their education and side hustles all at once, true release can be a challenge to come by. This is felt even more deeply when the struggle is ongoing, with no end or salvation in sight. The American government neglects communities of color and denies those demographics sufficient funding for basic resources such as schools, libraries and reliable public transportation, without having to travel outside of our localities to find it.¹⁷² This can come with complications of its own, exacerbated by factors such

¹⁶⁹ Pittman argues "A White individual holding their belongings tighter when a Black individual approaches" as an example of a microaggression (Pittman 2012: 83). See:

Chavella T. Pittman, "Racial Microaggressions: The Narratives of African American Faculty at a Predominantly White University," *The Journal of Negro Education* 81, no. 1 (2012): 82-92.
Julie Minikel-Lacocque, "Racism, College, and the Power of Words: Racial Microaggressions Reconsidered," *American Educational Research Journal* 50, no. 3 (2013): 432-65.

¹⁷⁰ For more on the subject of Black American women and mental health, see:

Ronald C. Kessler, Kristin D. Mickelson, and David R. Williams, "The Prevalence, Distribution, and Mental Health Correlates of Perceived Discrimination in the United States," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 3 (1999): 208.

<https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>

According to the American Psychiatry Association, "only one in three African Americans who need mental health care receives it" (p 2) and "Black people with mental health conditions, particularly schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, and other psychoses are more likely to be incarcerated than people of other races" (p 3). Source:

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Pxwte6OCGMsJ:https://www.psychiatry.org/File%2520Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/Mental-Health-Disparities/Mental-Health-Facts-for-African-Americans.pdf+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari>

¹⁷¹ However do not be mistaken, we are by no means limited to or by any circumstance of our lives, good or bad. The success of Black and Brown women in punk is in fact a fine example of the extent of our resilience.

¹⁷² The Pew Research Center has produced numerous reports on racial inequality in the United States. See their recent work/stats on income inequality here: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/12/key-findings-on-the-rise-in-income-inequality-within-americas-racial-and-ethnic-groups/>

as lack of access to public or private transportation. This has been attributed by critical race theorists (and Black people everywhere) to greater white America's refusal to engage with structures of inequality on the home front. Things like hope and faith are fleeting when prejudice and racism are so embedded in an individual's everyday experience.

My research highlighted many aspects of the punk scene that I had not recognized as a problem until I began engaging critically with the questions I pose in this thesis.¹⁷³ I realized that there were values shared among women punks in the earliest years of the scene (late 1970's) regarding femininity, respectability and self-expression/presentation. In *Cinderella's Big Score*, rock journalist Maria Raha describes Styrene's personal style and stage presence as "asexually bizarre."¹⁷⁴ Raha uses Styrene's subversion of gender roles as a way to establish a larger point about power and agency in punk.

[Styrene's] open defiance of the sexual roles routinely slated for women in music not only highlights the necessity to actively resist objectification in ways that allowed for no misinterpretation by the press, it also underlines that actions like these would have most likely cost mainstream crooners like Newton-John and Ronstadt their careers. Yet as these actions prove common, control could be had in the world of punk.¹⁷⁵

The above excerpt essentially describes respectability politics and applies them critically to women rock musicians.¹⁷⁶ Raha claims that the downplaying of one's

¹⁷³ Being half white, I had convinced myself that I could simply blend with the white people and not stick out too much; an obviously naïve ideal not even slightly rooted in reality as I would come to realize.

¹⁷⁴ Raha, 74.

¹⁷⁵ Raha, 62.

¹⁷⁶ Higginbotham coined the term "respectability politics" in 1993. She uses it to describe the women of the Black Baptist Church women's movement who empowered themselves through self-determination of a moral standard rooted in Christianity. The concept has since been deconstructed and reconstructed to support other aspects of modern feminism.

sexuality was a “necessity” considering the times (the 1970’s and 80’s). Firstly, neither Olivia Newton-John nor Linda Ronstadt were rockers. Both enjoyed fruitful pop careers. The former’s country music received its fair share of accolades while the latter dabbled in different musical styles including Latin, country, and rock.¹⁷⁷ Therefore the attempt to compare the experiences of pop stars (who are popular among the masses by definition) and those of underground punks makes for a rather faulty argument. It is unclear why Raha thought drawing this comparison would help her establish her argument women’s agency and self-presentation in navigating the early punk scene. The punk scene is, at its theoretical core, anti mainstream. By comparing it to pop, not pop punk or pop rock, which would have added nuance to her argument, Raha only creates confusion where her analysis should be coming in clear and strong. Raha’s analysis also supports the idea of femininity as a negative trait to be stifled and even eradicated. Without further analysis, Raha has led me to believe that she, like many others who write about women, feminism and femininity, considers femininity to be something a woman should be ready and willing to compromise if they hope to be better accepted in a space they feel they belong in and to. This is comparable to living with an abusive

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Womens Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. New York, 1993, 145.

See: Susana M. Morris, *Close Kin and Distant Relatives: The Paradox of Respectability in Black Women's Literature*, Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2014.

Gay L. Byron, and Vanessa Lovelace, eds, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, Atlanta, GA, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016.

For more on the discussion being forged by the Black feminist community in regards to respectability politics, the website *Twitter* is a great source for accessible and concise information about its definition and the nature of that conversation today. All you have to do is visit the website and simply search “respectability politics.” There are a slew of reputable Twitter users ready to engage with others about this topic from college professors to writers, to sex workers, attorneys, and scholars of all disciplines.

¹⁷⁷ <http://olivianewton-john.com/bio.html>

<https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/linda-ronstadt>

parent or partner. The subordinate panders to the dominant figure (men dominate punk) for the right to exist and remain. I am not saying this is what Styrene did but it is certainly worth critiquing and questioning.

Raha's comments remind me that the punk scene is complex and full of contradictions, as is the writing of its history. While potentially stifling for women whose femininity is an essential component of their being, as I have just explained, the punk scene is still regarded as an incubator for self-expression and personal agency. Raha's assessment speaks only to the route taken by a select group of cishetero women punks during this period ('74-'79) in order to be respected by the men they shared the stage with.¹⁷⁸ This route is characterized by efforts taken to downplay one's beauty and/or femininity so as to be perceived as equal or equally talented as the men. Styrene's attempted erasure of her gender was her way of challenging society's imposed expectations of how she should engage with her own femininity on stage. She even claimed once that she would shave her head if she ever became a sex symbol.¹⁷⁹ Styrene elaborates in an interview,

You've gotta keep boys at bay when you're working with them... if they're gonna take you seriously, you don't put the makeup on every day, you don't flutter your eyelashes... it's serious because I'm working with them. I've got to tell them how to play guitar, where to come in on the drum solo and so therefore I did adopt a slightly tomboyish look and I carried that through to the visuals as well.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ I mention these women's gender and sexuality here because the Queercore scene was being forged from the glam rock tradition (the same tradition that served as a prototype for punk) at the exact same time as punk (late 1970's and 80's). Queercore obviously looked very different from the punk scene in the sense that it was created for queer people. On the other hand, punk attracted mainly straight white people, meaning the dynamics were quite different. Queercore is an essential part of music and punk history although unfortunately, the history is too vast to adequately trace/capture in this thesis due to time.

¹⁷⁹ Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002, 496.

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NznmF9cyFpw> (Quote can be found at the 2:20 mark.)

It was Styrene's impression and experience that the boys in the scene only respected each other and that she had to put in extra effort to counter that. To present as pretty or feminine or sexual in any way would have diminished her (punk) credibility in the eyes of male punks and thus slowed down her creative process. As a result, she made the strategic decision to compromise parts of her self in order to move more freely in a music scene supposedly created in the spirit of free self-expression and rejection of the norm. Styrene would not have felt the need to erase her sexuality and womanhood if the early punk scene were not truly a boy's club.¹⁸¹

Exene Cervenka, an L.A. based punk who found success as a musician within her respective scene in the late 1970's, the same time Styrene became a fixture of the U.K. scene, mirrors this same sentiment around respectability within the scene and how to obtain it. Original female punks like Cervenka and Styrene sometimes downplayed their natural physical beauty and sexuality so that they might be taken seriously as musicians and even further, to avoid harassment and the far reach of toxic masculinity in a male dominated music scene.¹⁸²

In the fall of 2016, roughly forty years after the birth of L.A. punk, I took a

¹⁸¹ Styrene was also known to rock braces throughout X-Ray Spex's stint in the limelight of early punk. Braces are normally associated with children and youthfulness. Others may infantilize adults who wear them for this reason and it is likely that Styrene experienced this as well. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8hAqdx7g4M>

¹⁸² Toxic masculinity is a social concept, which refers to behaviors that are inherently misogynistic and anti-woman/femme, often times violently so. Toxic masculinity and those who subscribe to it aim to exercise power over what they perceive to be the inferior sex/gender. See:

Jeremy Posadas, "Teaching the Cause of Rape Culture: Toxic Masculinity," *Journal of Feminist Studies In Religion* 33, no. 1 (2017): 177-79.

Andrew L. Yarrow, "Masculinity, Mating, and Misogyny," In *Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life*, 61-84. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018.

research trip to Cornell University for PunkFest, an annual conference dedicated to the history, legacy, and endurance of punk music both in the United States and in Europe.¹⁸³ I attended a panel discussion featuring early L.A. punk scene staples, Exene Cervenka and John Doe of the band “X”. During the discussion, Cervenka responded to a question about sexism in the underground punk scene of the 70’s by claiming that if there were sexist elements or occurrences forty years ago, then she was unaware of it. She attributed this assessment to her notoriety as the wife of fellow X member, John Doe. She essentially claimed that marrying someone in the scene earned her respect from others and that it protected her, rather than the talent that she exuded. Cervenka takes it further, claiming that she was not impacted by sexism due to her choice to forgo the “funny outfits” that some of her (more famous) contemporaries were wearing at the time. She used the 1970’s all girl band that launched the careers of Joan Jett and Runaways as an example.¹⁸⁴ In an argument that actually reinforces the power of sexism, she argued that adopting a gender-neutral “tomboy” style of dress helped stave off unwanted sexual attention from male punks.¹⁸⁵ However, it is entirely possible that being married also served the same function, a fact that Cervenka seems to be unwilling or unable to analyze.

Cervenka’s most controversial comments (in my opinion) were in regards to what she has interpreted to be a negative effect sexually empowered women such as Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez are having on young girls today.¹⁸⁶ Cervenka speculates

¹⁸³ Masha, of the Russian punk band, Pussy Riot, was also on a panel that weekend.

¹⁸⁴ For a comparison of the Runaways’ and Cervenka’s aesthetic choices, see Appendix ii of this thesis.

¹⁸⁵ I use ‘tomboy’ in this thesis because it is the word often used by cishetero women punks of the 1970’s to describe their personal styles at the time. The definition of that term has expanded since then. The queer community has adopted it to encompass a common type of gender presentation.

¹⁸⁶ Or perhaps she’s criticizing the negative effects and ethics of marketing female sexual

and jokes poorly about how the only lessons young women can hope to learn from these two pop stars and their music are akin to the kinds of lessons one learns “in the backseat of a car.”¹⁸⁷ In Beyoncé’s case specifically, and after the release of her 2017 album “Lemonade”, I believe I need not elaborate on the feminist impact that album is currently having on Black women and girls everywhere. In many respects, Cervenka’s comments were both sexist and racist at their core.¹⁸⁸ There is a stereotype among Black and Latino women, which claims without evidence that they are somehow more sexually promiscuous, devious, and frankly, inherently evil or devilish as compared to their white counterparts who are often depicted as pure, keepers of true unadulterated femininity. There is a body of scholarship dedicated to breaking down the social constructions of femininity across racial lines, a byproduct of the foundational intersectional feminist theory of the 1980’s.¹⁸⁹ Cervenka’s response implies that these two mega stars somehow lack agency over their image and physical bodies. This belief is deeply rooted in racism and enslavement, a period when very few Black people in America had the right to decide what they did with their bodies. When a white woman uses women of color

empowerment. Cervenka also fails to consider what it means for Black and Brown women and girls to see themselves represented in the mainstream music industry, not made any less important to us or less valuable because there’s money being made off of it.

¹⁸⁷ The sexual undertones in Cervenka’s statement and the manner in which she uses them indicates that there is a layer of misogyny clearly impacting the way she views her legacy and that of other women musicians. (Exene Cervenka, PunkFest, panel discussion, Cornell University, November 4, 2016.)

¹⁸⁸ And if you haven’t heard the record or seen the accompanying visual aid I highly recommend doing so.

¹⁸⁹ Johnnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Womens Equality in African American Communities*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

Juan Battle and Sandra L. Barnes, *Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010.

and their actual bodies as a scapegoat for the toxic masculinity and racism that is surely present in the American punk scene despite her narrow perception, she perpetuates the cycle of toxic masculinity. Cervenka is operating out of a framework that supports the idea that there are “good” women and “bad” women and that any negative stereotyping directed towards those “bad” women is their own fault. Instead, Cervenka might have engaged with the question more meaningfully and shown solidarity with Black and Brown women punks accordingly. Cervenka’s comments seem especially inappropriate and out of pocket considering that both Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez found mainstream success as pop/hip hop/R&B artists and not as rock stars such as was the case for Cervenka’s first comparison of the Runaways. The punk community and industry are quite different considering hip hop and R&B’s deep roots in Black American culture. There are different expectations of women artists across each of these genres, which Cervenka clearly knows little to nothing about. Further, in mentioning Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez in particular, it comes off as no mistake that the women she chooses as examples are Black and Brown, as Black female sexuality has often been the subject of unwarranted racism, scrutiny, debate and stereotyping.¹⁹⁰

By choosing not to stand in the power of her own punk credibility and degrading other women, both Black and Brown, in the process, Cervenka exposed the sexism and racism that she has internalized. She appeared uncomfortable about the question that was asked and attempted to dodge what was perhaps an

¹⁹⁰ See definitions of stereotypes of Black female sexuality, “Sapphire” is essentially an unapologetic Black woman who stands in her power and is disliked for it. “Jezebel” is a Black woman who exploits her sexuality and femininity in order to secure whatever she desires. See also: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10057104>.

important moment for the women/femmes in the audience by centering her ex-husband and male sensibilities in general in response to a question about sexism and the exclusion of women in punk. At best, Cervenka exemplifies the attempts made by past generations of punks to maintain the impossible idea of an unadulterated punk utopia. At worst, she was oblivious (or faked oblivion) to inter-scene violence against women because she was privileged enough to be musically talented/respected and romantically involved with an influential member of the scene. However, punk generations of the past do not get a free pass to simply disassociate with punk's negative aspects. In doing this, Cervenka lost an opportunity to discuss the vulnerability that women who did not have access to her privileges struggled against. Further, she leaves them vulnerable to the violence that may occur against them in a space where men are common and toxic masculinity is consequently bred.

Cervenka's obvious discomfort, disapproval and ultimately, her perceived superiority due to Jennifer Lopez and Beyoncé's overt performances of Black and Latina female sexuality enlists an outdated politic of respectability. Respectability politics affect all women in this country but just like any visible manifestation of misogyny, Black and Brown women experience the imposition of these negative values differently and more profoundly. Punks today are correcting this problem in the music community and thus making space for themselves in an environment plagued by racial microaggression and "colorblindness."¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ A term white folks use often without realizing that they are only "colorblind" because they are privileged enough to go through life without experiencing the effects of racism first hand, even if they do "have Black friends." Many "colorblind" white folks may also want to avoid the inconvenience or

I would argue that forging our own brands of feminism has been pivotal to the survival and growth of our communities (Black and Brown), doubly affected by the sexism and racism of a nation whose values rest upon centuries of white supremacy, forced labor, enslavement, capitalism, and the trauma of generations Black and Brown people.¹⁹² Victoria Ruiz of Downtown Boys spoke extensively to this point in her oral history stating that

In Providence a lot more women [are] booking shows... The hard part is that white feminist punk spaces are also really bad so there are so many white, feminist punks who are just so obsessed with being a woman that in my experience, I'm like, you remember you're a white woman right? You know what I mean? And that part's been really hard for me to take and think about too... There are just so many ways in which it [the Providence punk scene] was very racist because it was so race-less... That's one of the huge issues I have with feminism with a capital F and it's why I kind of almost steer clear of using the word "feminist" often. It's because a lot of the leaders of the feminist with a capital F discussion especially in the punk community are, it's a completely race-less discussion and I have had many friends who are men of color be the targets of wanting to have a target so bad that they find men of color somehow always more threatening, always more something and never enough... I wish so many white women could realize that we are so past [their] discussion, we're past [their] discourse, we've got our own discourse and in fact, were ready to talk about our music in critical accord and simultaneously support each other.¹⁹³

Alice Walker coined the term "Womanism" in a volume of essays entitled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* in 1983 when Black feminism was really beginning to take shape being a fairly new discipline. Womanism was a way of distinguishing

discomfort of considering how the most barbaric time in our collective human history has had lasting negative effects.

¹⁹² For more information on Womanism and Intersectionality see:

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Alice Walker, "Everyday Use," New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, ed. *Critical Race Theory*, New Press, 1995.

Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013): 785-810.

¹⁹³ Victoria Ruiz, Interviewed by Courtney Aucone, December 11, 2016.

Black Feminism from a racist variety, which rarely if ever includes Black women and women of color.¹⁹⁴ Walker describes a womanist as "a black feminist or feminist of color."¹⁹⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw coined "intersectionality" in 1989 to describe the ways race and gender impact Black women's employment experiences.¹⁹⁶ Since then, the definition has been theoretically developed and is constantly expanded by Black Feminist scholars such as Crenshaw, Davis, Carbado, Hill Collins, and Puar who builds upon and pushes against intersectionality's bounds in a slight contrast.¹⁹⁷ Both concepts represent the importance of Black and Brown women's voices in establishing feminist political values, which place the experiences and needs of women of color at the forefront of both discussion and activism.

The punk scene today in terms of the way women punks interact with one another and with the scene is also changing and ever-evolving. This is owed to the efforts of this generation of Black and Brown women punks who are following in the tradition of these game-changing theoretical concepts. Ruiz exemplifies this by

¹⁹⁴ Refer to the first women's rights movement of the late 19th century, which ended in 1920 with the passing of the 19th amendment, giving women the right to vote.

Amber E. Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 127-28.

¹⁹⁵ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, xi.

¹⁹⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989): 52-78.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, no. 2-3 (2006).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.

Jasbir Puar, "I'd Rather Be A Cyborg Than a Goddess: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *Philosophia* 2 (1) 2012: 49-66.

Devon Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4) 2013: 811-845.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

making a point to keep the show spaces Downtown Boys performs in open and safe for women of color specifically. She says,

When there are women of color at the show who I know are there because I'm a woman of color I feel pressure in a good way to make sure they like it but those are good forms of pressure. Less and less I feel pressure to make people feel comfortable. I think I used to feel that pressure. I think I used to want to make everybody feel comfortable and everybody feel included but there are people who come to the shows that feel uncomfortable all the time. And it's ok if they feel uncomfortable. The only pressure that I want to maintain is that they don't feel alienated. So I feel pressure to make sure that people feel like they're getting something out in the space but that they don't feel alienated.

The above quote describes Ruiz's understanding of comfort v alienation. People are often drawn to underground scenes because they feel alienated from the outside world and are looking for their place. Comfort in the context of Downtown Boys' music and live stage performances can only be a reference to the political topics they lyricize about sexism, capitalism, and race. Ruiz appears to be aware of the impact her music has to the extent that she consciously avoids falling into a trap of prioritizing those who represent the ideals she stands against in her music. Ruiz does not concern herself with the sensibilities of her white audience. Instead she places her energy and efforts into ensuring that women of color feel included, welcome, and safe (read: not alienated). This, in my opinion, is a far better take on Riot Grrrl's "girls to the front" ideology.¹⁹⁸

Ruiz discusses sexuality and gender in contrast to the values of punks from generations passed. Downtown Boys use sexuality and the power of self-

¹⁹⁸ Big Freedia, New Orleans-based Bounce legend and Princess Nokia, a rapper from New York are also improving upon this concept at their live performances. See:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MLbC6UIIj0

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKE-7wLBVSE>

presentation thematically in their music to express their stance on the matter transparently. Members of the band have identified as queer and gender non-conforming and thus present in the world as such. This includes stage performance.

Ruiz says,

Our music touches on sexuality in a giant way but we're not about defining that in contrast to white supremacist models of sexuality. We're about talking about sexuality in terms of power and how white patriarchy has created these false baselines of what a woman is or what a man is, how we're actually trying to abolish those baselines and fight for freedom and so when we talk about sexuality we have a new song where the line is "somos chulas no somos pendejas."¹⁹⁹ We're chula, we're people who confuse the colonial mind, we're not dumb, and I think that thinking of it in terms of power like that is a little bit more useful than in thinking about it in terms of hetero-normative sexuality.²⁰⁰

Ruiz and Downtown Boys define sexuality in terms that better suit their ideals, values and individuality. "White supremacist models of sexuality" presumably refers to the heterosexual structure of romantic partnership that was imposed by European colonizers during the Atlantic Slave Trade. Any reputable scholar of the African Diaspora will confirm that the social impositions of former colonizers remain influential in Caribbean, American, and South American cultures to this day.²⁰¹ The latter part of Ruiz's statement is essentially a reflection of queer and Trans theory, which is constantly building to represent and center trans experiences. One of the foundational ideas of Trans theory is, as Ruiz says, to abolish the false baselines, which impose limitations on what a man or woman should be in

¹⁹⁹ Translates to "we're cute but we're not dumb."

²⁰⁰ Cervenka's aforementioned commentary at PunkFest is a great example of the hetero-normative ideals Ruiz is referring to.

Source: Victoria Ruiz, Interviewed by Courtney Aucone, December 11, 2016.

²⁰¹ To read further into this, see the social, political, and cultural histories of Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, the United States, post-abolition and any other country previously colonized by European powers.

terms of both anatomy and outward presentation.²⁰² Ruiz's comments highlight the power in refusing to conform. Downtown Boys seek to utilize the confusion that non-conformity has a tendency to create in order to more effectively mold the world in an image of authentic self-identification, and thus, Trans liberation. This is what it looks like when oppressed communities and individuals alike fight to take back the power that has been consolidated by the ruling and exploitative classes.

Ruiz added later to this last thought, saying that in the songs themselves "We get to think broader about power but in terms of what we're going to say between songs or in interviews or what we're fighting for in our personal lives, it's still very much [us] fighting against the white man's world."²⁰³ Ruiz asserts that punk has indeed provided herself and Downtown Boys with a degree of agency and autonomy over their physical bodies and how they present themselves on stage and in the world. The messages they deliver between songs can be borderline controversial, pulling on themes of worker exploitation, immigration, indigenous rights, and violence against women. They often include calls to action with an emphasis on collective voice and collaboration. Live stage performances such as the ones I have described in this thesis have undeniable potential to serve as an educational tool depending on the audience. Her comments also establish that in many ways, their music is their activist work, a means by which they as a collective contribute to the fight for and discussion around economic, social, racial, and gender equality. In a

²⁰² Jodi O'Brien, *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009.
 Laura Erickson-Schroth, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource For the Transgender Community*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
 Susan Stryker, "Transing the Queer (In)Human," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 227-230.

²⁰³ Victoria Ruiz, Interviewed by Courtney Aucone, December 11, 2016.

2017 interview with Interview Magazine, Ruiz along with the rest of Downtown Boys answered questions about their latest work, an album entitled “Cost of Living.” There is a point in the interview when Ruiz claims “[Downtown Boys have] been revving up the engine in terms of what we talk about and the things that we hit; we can go a little bit deeper, and get a little bit more nuanced. I think this new batch of songs... If you’ve never heard Downtown Boys before it might not be apparent, like it used to be, that we’re super anti-police or really anti-capitalist, because these songs have these nuances.”²⁰⁴ Ruiz is describing the evolution of Downtown Boys’ music and how the political is a crucial component of their progress as a band. The political message has been there from the start and is thus at the very heart of what they do.

“Somos Chulas (No Somos Pendejas)” is a song featured on their third album “Cost of Living” (2017) and is an obvious feminist commentary on the general lack of respect paid to femmes.²⁰⁵ The lyrics touch on the ways that femmes are essentially discouraged from being multi-dimensional. It is a protest song against those who would pigeonhole us and repackage us in ways that are more traditionally and socially acceptable. Ruiz also belts it out in Spanish, which is significant.²⁰⁶ For these reasons, the song is a punch in the gut to the status quo. “It Can’t Wait” off of the same album is a commentary on white fragility and hesitation to accept racism as the social sickness that it is.²⁰⁷ The song also addresses white privilege and how it causes white people to ignore and thus deny that racism is still

²⁰⁴ <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/downtown-boys>

²⁰⁵ “Femme” is a term used by the queer community for those who identify with the feminine or as feminine. See: <https://www.autostraddle.com/what-we-mean-when-we-say-femme-a-roundtable-341842/>

²⁰⁶ For an analysis of this, refer back to chapter 2 of this thesis.

²⁰⁷ Refer to appendix i of this thesis for lyrics.

a common occurrence. It can be interpreted as an attack on the bubble of whiteness that keeps people with privilege and power from engaging with and believing in the struggles of Black and Brown folk.

Downtown Boys' music is thus a commentary in true punk fashion on sexism and other forms of oppression. The feminist protest chants one hears at a Downtown Boys show can be used in any context, not just for the fun of it at the DIY function. Punk shows become exhibitions of personal politics and can be great fun to attend for their unique, in-your-face take-it-or-leave-it-we-don't-care energy. But there is far more at stake at a Downtown Boys show and Black and Brown punks are aware of that.

Mosh pits and the act of slam dancing at punk shows pose a possible threat to women's safety. A mosh pit is a space in the middle of the dance floor/venue that is cleared out during a punk show (or a metal show)²⁰⁸ where members of the audience can then enter the circle and flail about, making physical contact with other people's limbs which gradually appear to have minds of their own. Mosh pits are essentially a space where show-goers can feel free to fight one another and release whatever aggression has been bottled and internalized. In theory, mosh pits are great. They represent a semi-controlled space (controlled only in the sense that folks are aware that it is happening and will not attempt to stop it from happening) where individuals can then relinquish all physical control for at least a couple two-minute, manic, anxiety-inducing songs, which help drive the aggression of the performance forward. While many women do participate in the pit, others

²⁰⁸ These are the two most popular types of shows where one is almost guaranteed to encounter an active pit.

deliberately avoid it. Some women absolutely identify with this form of aggression while others want to avoid as a general rule, being struck by a grown man. Mosh pits can also pit grown men against women both half their age and half their size to the extent that artists like Hanna, Big Freedia, and Princess Nokia have felt the need to claim the performance space for the safety of the women and femmes in the room. Most punk shows are all ages as a deliberate act to bring the community together, therefore the corresponding scene is cross-generational. Folks of all ages flock to punk shows because underground scenes and subcultural movements in general have the tendency to morph into safe, homey spaces that create a desire within those who are a part of it, to return possibly for nostalgia's sake and stay present within it for as long as possible. Thus is the duality of punk being both safe and dangerous for Black and Brown folks avoiding the mosh pit ritual for fear of being targeted as different.

Referring back to paternalism, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, older punks who feel they have a claim to the music and the scene they helped create, may show up at the DIY venue just to assert their ownership and authority over it. Paternalism leaves some feeling unwelcome and in the context of this thesis, potentially discriminated against. When accounted with slam-dancing, women of all ages are left vulnerable to physical and other types of harm when they attend shows, whether they've chosen to participate in the pit or not. Mosh pits, slam-dancing, or inter-circle fistfights do have a tendency to extend out of bounds and into the audience, putting the women standing off to the sides, avoiding the pit, at risk of being assaulted, leaving them no choice in the matter. This is violence against

women.

The connection between the individual and the scene, which they are or were once a part is not easily broken. Folks hesitate to abandon the environment that at once offered them shelter, therapy, community, and anything else they thought was missing from their lives. Any and all things could be negotiated from within the scene and solutions were decided through collaboration. As flawed as the underground punk scene is, it has provided myself and Black and Brown women like me with a community and a place to come to for artistic and emotional release. For me, this release occurs in spite of the power struggle that exists between those who “belong” and those who supposedly do not. Race and gender identity can either make us feel isolated or empowered to be the most authentic version of ourselves whether that be angry, quiet, loud, conservative or radical and then some. Ruiz says, “when I’m doing it right [music-making and performance], it’s completely intertwined with my emotions and that’s regardless of whether people think it’s right or wrong.”²⁰⁹ Punk encourages us to embrace every quality and contradiction and I feel lucky and blessed to have been so moved by this music and the Black and Brown women who continue to make it what it is.

²⁰⁹ Victoria Ruiz, Transcript of an oral history conducted in 2016, Interview by Courtney Aucone.

Conclusion:

I am always moved by the idea that when musicians perform they are sharing a feeling with us, their audience. Whatever motions or moods they are going through during their performance, we experience it too, with all five of our senses. We see them, we hear them; we can taste and smell the sweat, cigarettes, grass, and dirt in the air at the dirty DIY venue. When we look to our left and then to our right and see the flushed faces of our fellow concert-goers, bursting from the feeling of their own lived experiences, really looking and not just looking over like history has done to us since forever, those moments are solid. They are impressed upon our memories for life. And when we mouth the lyrics being sung, we simultaneously relive that inspiration in our own ways, through our own subjectivities. Whatever experiences originally inspired those lyrics is now our shared experience. For me, that is solidarity in its purest, most sacred form.

Something changed in me once I got to high school. I felt older and wiser, almost like I'd been forced to grow up sooner than others my age had. I had already had my first panic attack by that point. When I imagine my twelve-year-old-self bawling (an emotional response I frequently denied myself at that age) on the bathroom floor of the apartment I shared in Harlem with my mother I can still feel the anger and rage I felt in that exact moment, 12 years ago. It comes right back up like a ball of cotton caught in my throat, dragging unpleasantly against the dry skin there, threatening suffocation. I kept my sadness and rage locked away in the parts of my brain that I knew better than to go exploring for fear of hitting another low point, like I did that first time. In other words, I was avoiding the inevitable.

Back then, I did not trust my voice and I absolutely did not trust my feelings. Logic was the thing with me and at that age I was convinced logic would be the thing to save me from these situations that I was going so far out of my way to avoid. Around the same time, eleven years of Catholic education were beginning to catch up with me. My teachers expected me to embrace this religion and apply their stories to my life. They wanted me to learn from white Jesus and all his white friends who I was pretty sure were actually Black, geography and historical context considered. Mentally, I grew uncomfortable in that environment and physically, I felt out of place. I had questions about everything from my sexuality to my Dominican/Italian roots, but mostly about God and my faith, once strong but quickly escaping me in the desperate search for self-determination. I felt as though all the forces of nature (or rather, the all-white faculty at my all-Black and Brown high school for girls) were coming together to snuff me out of a space that was meant to be preparing me for a life of accomplishment and success.

When a Black or Brown girl takes the stage and performs her truth for an audience (Victoria Ruiz: "Somos chulas pero no somos pendejas!") of Black and Brown faces scattered amongst the white, not only do we get the chance to bear witness to a woman like us, claiming her space and standing in her power, we see ourselves reflected in her and we become connected to a moment, this moment, forever.

Until my discovery of punk music, all my life I had used logic to overcome life's minor challenges. I offered overly simplistic explanations for things that could

not easily be explained; things like feelings and emotional responses just to avoid actively engaging with them myself. The thought of having to trace the roots of my feelings of alienation, abandonment, and angst was decidedly too much for me to bear so my natural response was to get really angry.

This was accompanied by extreme efforts to keep my anger in control. I never wanted folks to feel as though they could police my anger the way I had watched people treat my mom's anger my entire life. I never wanted to be accused of being too angry or too out of control. I was terrified that someone would take it upon themselves to try and silence this brewing tempest. So I set the intention to never appear on the surface as angry as I truly was.

I actively dodged these kinds of labels is because I never saw myself that way, as an angry woman like my mom was. I wanted her to be calmer, gentler, but by the time I was a teenager, I understood. My mother's rage and the love that followed shortly after was the culmination of a lifetime of mental and physical trauma.

I was a sensitive child, quiet and stoic. I carried the pain of both my mother and my father everywhere I went because I felt it was my responsibility to do so. I saw few healthy examples of how to work through the anger that quietly festered inside of me. At the same time, like my so many others, I continued to be deeply affected by the many injustices our society thrust upon my gender, race and sexuality. I had to search desperately for an emotional outlet that was healthier than the models I had seen in my youth. So I turned to punk music, which seemed to understand me in a way that no one else did at that time in my life. It reached me in a way that no one else could. The music did not judge or endeavor to compare

struggles and experiences, dismissing my pain in the process like folks sometimes do, even when their intentions are good. The music just was, and it still is one person's attempt to reach and resonate with other humans.

When a Brown girl like Victoria Ruiz gets on stage, ranting and building in anger with every word she growls, the energy builds and my stomach does flips. I am excited by what she is saying and even further by the aggressiveness of the drums coming in loud and strong, almost as though they are feeding off of the energy being shared between Ruiz and the audience. The anger and emotion in the room reaches its peak and I am so ready for this climax. She reminds me that I am Brown and I am smart and suddenly things don't matter as much. When I am present at the DIY function I am not thinking about racial microaggressions. I am not thinking of the instances when I was disrespected or ignored by those who underestimated my abilities and competency because of how I look or act. I can thrash and yell if I so chose. I can connect with other people who are looking to make sense of the situations and realities that anger them. That is an incredibly freeing and affirming experience. In a rare moment of emotional vulnerability, I allow myself to feel what has been repressed. When the audience responds physically and verbally to Ruiz's call, an understanding and connection is established.

Everyone just wants to be heard and understood. Punk music was a vehicle for me, which drove me to a better understanding of who I was in the world, who I could be, and even further, who I wanted to be. Punk gave me purpose and identity. I

still struggle with my mental health and don't know that I will ever feel as stable as I wish I could be but that's ok. My local scene will never reject me. My local scene expects nothing from me but to be present and to take from it what I need and for that I will always be indebted to it. And I am indebted to Black and Brown women such as Ruiz and Styrene for daring me to be bolder, louder and more radical in my approach to a seriously messed up world and if my words could not truly capture the spirit of this music form, I urge everyone reading this to go to a show and be present. You won't regret it.

Appendix i: Song Lyrics

Milly Quezada

Lo Tengo Todo (Hasta Siempre, 1997)

Cuando no estas me parece que he perdido todo
 Cuando vuelves me siento otra vez tan feliz
 Todo lo bueno del mundo me parece poco
 Si no te tengo a mi lado
 Si no estas cerca de mi... Cuando no estas me parece que he perdido todo
 Cuando vuelves me siento otra vez tan feliz.
 Todo lo bueno del mundo me parece poco
 Si no te tengo a mi lado
 Si no estas cerca de mi

Yo que he encontrado en tu boca el más bello tesoro
 Y si me faltan tus beso pudiera morir
 Porque fundirme en tu piel es todo lo que añoro
 Porque yo lo tengo todo
 Solo teniéndote a tiiii

Y es que lo tengo todo
 Si me miro en tus ojos
 Y es que lo tengo todo
 Si tu estas junto a mi
 Y es que poquito a poco
 Me vas volviendo loca
 Y ya no encuentro el modo
 Para vivir sin ti

Cuando te vas yo me quedo recordando todo
 Vivo soñando el momento en que vuelvas a mi
 No necesito diamantes, marfiles ni oro
 Porque yo lo tengo todo
 Solo teniéndote a ti..

Para Darte Mi Vida (Vive, 1998)

Para darte mi vida yo volveré
 Salida del incendio del amor q soñe
 Para darte mi vida, para darte mi vida yo volveré
 Volando en una estrella y en ti renacer
 Para darte mi vida, yo volveré...

Para Olvidarte (Vive, 1998)

Para olvidarte
 Y no pensar que todavia yo te quiero
 Hago lavados cada dia de cerebro
 Peru sigo enamorada de ti...

Sarah McLachlanIce Cream (Fumbling Towards Ecstasy, 1993)

Your love
 Is better than ice cream.
 Better than anything else that I've tried
 And your love
 Is better than ice cream
 Everyone here knows how to cry

Hold On (Fumbling Towards Ecstasy, 1993)

Hold on to yourself
 For this is gonna hurt like hell
 Hold on
 Hold on to yourself
 You know that only time will tell
 My love
 You know that you're my best friend
 You know that I'd do anything for you
 And my love
 Let nothing come between us
 My love for you is strong and true

X-Ray SpexI Am a Cliché (1978)

I am a cliché
 I am a cliché, I am a cliché
 I am a cliché, I am a cliché
 I am a cliché you've seen before
 I am a cliché that lives next door
 I am a cliché you know what I mean
 I am a cliché pink is obscene
 Yama yama yama yama yama yama
 Boredom boredom boring boredom

Yama yama yama yama yama yama
 Boredom boredom boring boredom
 I am a cliché
 I am a cliché, I am a cliché
 I am a cliché, I am a cliché
 I am a cliché you've seen before
 I am a cliché that lives next door
 I am a cliché you know what I mean
 I am a cliché pink is obscene
 Yama yama yama yama yama yama
 Boredom boredom boring boredom
 Yama yama yama yama yama yama
 Boredom boredom boring boredom

Identity (Germfree Adolescents, 1978)

[Chorus]

Identity is the crisis can't you see
 Identity identity

[Verse 1]

When you look in the mirror
 Do you see yourself
 Do you see yourself
 On the TV screen
 Do you see yourself in the magazine
 When you see yourself
 Does it make you scream

[Chorus]

Identity is the crisis can't you see
 Identity identity

[Chorus]

Identity is the crisis can't you see
 Identity identity

[Verse 2]

When you look in the mirror
 Do you smash it quick
 Do you take the glass
 And slash your wrists
 Did you do it for fame
 Did you do it in a fit
 Did you do it before
 You read about it

[Chorus]

Identity is the crisis can't you see
Identity identity

The Day the World Turned Day-Glo (Germfree Adolescents, 1978)

[Verse 1]

I clambered over mounds and mounds
Of polystyrene foam
And fell into a swimming pool
Filled with fairy snow

[Chorus]

And watched the world turn day-glo
You know you know
The world turned day-glo
You know
Oh-oh

[Verse 2]

I wrenched the nylon curtains back
As far as they would go
And peered through Perspex window panes
At the acrylic road

[Chorus]

And watched the world turn day-glo
You know you know
The world turned day-glo
You know
Oh-oh

[Verse 3]

I drove my polypropylene
Car on wheels of sponge
Then pulled into a wimpy bar
To have a rubber bun

[Chorus]

And watched the world turn day-glo
You know you know
The world turned day-glo
You know
Oh-oh

[Sax Solo]

[Chorus]

The world turn day-glo
 You know you know
 The world turned day-glo
 You know
 Oh-oh

[Verse 4]

The X-rays were penetrating
 Through the latex breeze
 Synthetic fibre see-thru leaves
 Fell from the rayon trees

[Chorus]

The day the world turn day-glo
 You know you know
 The world turned day-glo
 You know you know
 The world turned day-glo
 You know you know
 The world turned day-glo
 You know
 Oh-oh

The Velvet Underground

Heroin (The Velvet Underground & Nico, 1967)

[Verse 1]

I don't know just where I'm going
 But I'm gonna try for the kingdom, if I can
 Cause it makes me feel like I'm a man
 When I put a spike into my vein
 And I tell you things aren't quite the same
 When I'm rushing on my run
 And I feel just like Jesus' son

[Chorus]

And I guess that I just don't know
 And I guess that I just don't know

[Verse 2]

I have made big decision
 I'm gonna try to nullify my life

Cause when the blood begins to flow
When it shoots up the dropper's neck
When I'm closing in on death
You can't help me, not you guys
And all you sweet girls with all your sweet talk
You can all go take a walk

[Chorus]

And I guess I just don't know
And I guess that I just don't know

[Verse 3]

I wish that I was born a thousand years ago
I wish that I'd sailed the darkened seas
On a great big clipper ship
Going from this land here to that
In a sailor's suit and cap
Away from the big city
Where a man cannot be free
Of all the evils of this town
And of himself and those around

[Chorus]

Oh, and I guess that I just don't know
Oh, and I guess that I just don't know

[Verse 4]

Heroin, be the death of me
Heroin, it's my wife and it's my life, haha
Because a mainline into my vein
Leads to a center in my head
And then I'm better off than dead
Because when the smack begins to flow
I really don't care anymore
About all the Jim-Jims in this town
And all the politicians making crazy sounds
And everybody putting everybody else down
And all the dead bodies piled up in mounds
Cause when the smack begins to flow
And I really don't care anymore
Ah, when that heroin is in my blood
Heh, and that blood is in my head
Then thank God that I'm as good as dead
And thank your God that I'm not aware
And thank God that I just don't care

Venus in Furs (The Velvet Underground & Nico, 1967)

[Verse 1]

Shiny, shiny, shiny boots of leather
Whiplash girlchild in the dark
Comes in bells, your servant, don't forsake him
Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart

[Verse 2]

Downy sins of streetlight fancies
Chase the costumes she shall wear
Ermine furs adorn the imperious
Severin, Severin awaits you there

[Chorus]

I am tired, I am weary
I could sleep for a thousand years
A thousand dreams that would awake me
Different colors made of tears

[Verse 3]

Kiss the boot of shiny, shiny leather
Shiny leather in the dark
Tongue of thongs, the belt that does await you
Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart

[Verse 4]

Severin, Severin, speak so slightly
Severin, down on your bended knee
Taste the whip, in love not given lightly
Taste the whip, now bleed for me

[Chorus]

I am tired, I am weary
I could sleep for a thousand years
A thousand dreams that would awake me
Different colors made of tears

[Outro]

Shiny, shiny, shiny boots of leather
Whiplash girlchild in the dark
Severin, your servant comes in bells, please don't forsake him
Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart

Sex Pistols

Anarchy In The U.K. (Never Mind the Bullocks, Here's the Sex Pistols, 1977)

Right
Now
ha ha ha ha ha...

I am an antichrist
I am an anarchist
Don't know what I want
But I know how to get it
I wanna destroy passer by

Cause I
Wanna be
Anarchy
No dog's body

Anarchy for the UK
It's coming sometime and maybe
I give a wrong time stop at traffic line
Your future dream is a shopping scheme

Cause I
I wanna be
Anarchy
In the city

How many ways to get what you want
I use the best
I use the rest
I use the enemy
I use anarchy

Cause I
Wanna be
Anarchy
It's the only way to be

Is this the M.P.L.A.
Or is this the U.D.A.
Or is this the I.R.A.
I thought it was the UK
Or just
Another

Country
Another council tenancy

I wanna be
Anarchy
And I wanna be
Anarchy
Know what I mean
And I wanna be
Anarchist
Get pissed
Destroy

God Save The Queen (Never Mind the Bullocks, Here's the Sex Pistols, 1977)

God save the queen
The fascist regime
They made you a moron
A potential H bomb
God save the queen
She's not a human being
and There's no future
And England's dreaming
Don't be told what you want
Don't be told what you need
There's no future
No future
No future for you
God save the queen
We mean it man
We love our queen
God saves
God save the queen
'Cause tourists are money
And our figurehead
Is not what she seems
Oh God save history
God save your mad parade
Oh Lord God have mercy
All crimes are paid
Oh when there's no future
How can there be sin
We're the flowers
In the dustbin
We're the poison
In your human machine

We're the future
 Your future
 God save the queen
 We mean it man
 We love our queen
 God saves
 God save the queen
 We mean it man
 There's no future
 In England's dreaming God save the queen
 No future
 No future
 No future for you
 No future
 No future
 No future for me

The Ramones

Sheena is a Punk Rocker (Leave Home, 1977)

Well the kids are all hopped up and ready to go
 They're ready to go now they got their surfboards
 And they're going to the discotheque Au Go Go
 But she just couldn't stay she had to break away
 Well New York City really has is all oh yeah, oh yeah

Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker now

Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker now

Well she's a punk punk, a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker

Well the kids are all hopped up and ready to go
 They're ready to go now they got their surfboards
 And they're going to the discotheque Au Go Go
 But she just couldn't stay she had to break away
 Well New York City really has is all oh yeah, oh yeah

Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker now

Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker now

Well she's a punk punk, a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker
 Punk punk a punk rocker

Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker
 Sheena is a punk rocker now

Rockaway Beach (Rocket to Russia, 1977)

Chewin' at a rhythm on my bubble gum
 The sun is out, I want some
 It's not hard, not far to reach
 We can hitch a ride to Rockaway Beach

Up on the roof, out on the street
 Down in the playground the hot concrete
 Bus ride is too slow
 They blast out the disco on the radio

Rock Rock Rockaway Beach
 Rock Rock Rockaway Beach
 Rock Rock Rockaway Beach
 We can hitch a ride to Rockaway Beach [x2]

It's not hard, not far to reach
 We can hitch a ride to Rockaway Beach [x2]

[Repeat all]

We're A Happy Family Lyrics (Rocket to Russia, 1977)

We're a happy family
 We're a happy family
 We're a happy family
 Me mom and daddy

Siting here in Queens
 Eating refried beans
 We're in all the magazines
 Gulpin' down thorazines

We ain't got no friends
 Our troubles never end
 No Christmas cards to send
 Daddy likes men

Daddy's telling lies
 Baby's eating flies
 Mommy's on pills
 Baby's got the chills

I'm friends with the President
 I'm friends with the Pope
 We're all making a fortune
 Selling Daddy's dope

I Wanna Be Sedated (Road to Ruin, 1978)

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go I wanna be sedated
 Nothin' to do and no where to go-o-oh I wanna be sedated
 Just get me to the airport put me on a plane
 Hurry hurry hurry before I go insane
 I can't control my fingers I can't control my brain
 Oh no no no no no

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go....
 Just put me in a wheelchair, get me on a plane
 Hurry hurry hurry before I go insane
 I can't control my fingers I can't control my brain
 Oh no no no no no

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go I wanna be sedated
 Nothin' to do and no where to go-o-o I wanna be sedated
 Just put me in a wheelchair get me to the show
 Hurry hurry hurry before I go loco
 I can't control my fingers I can't control my toes
 Oh no no no no no

Twenty-twenty-twenty four hours to go...
 Just put me in a wheelchair...
 Ba-ba-bamp-ba ba-ba-ba-bamp-ba I wanna be sedated
 Ba-ba-bamp-ba ba-ba-ba-bamp-ba I wanna be sedated
 Ba-ba-bamp-ba ba-ba-ba-bamp-ba I wanna be sedated
 Ba-ba-bamp-ba ba-ba-ba-bamp-ba I wanna be sedated

Dead Kennedys

Straight A's (Give Me Convenience or Give Me Death, 1987)

Sixteen, on the honor roll
I wish that I was dead
Parents hate me, I got zits
And bruises 'round my head
Pressure's on to get good grades
So I can be like them
Do my homework all the time
I can't go out just then
People they ain't friends at all
They tease and suck me dry
Yell at me when I fuck up
And party while I cry
I look so big on paper
I feel so fucking small
Want to die and you don't care
Just stride on down the hall
Suicide suicide
Read the paper, wonder why
Turn the light out, then you cry
It's your fault, you made me die
Touch me won't you touch me now
So frozen I can't love
When I was born my mama cried
And picked me up with gloves
Girls, they kick me in the eye
Want answers to the tests
When they get them they drive off
And leave me home to rest
Hold my head
Make me warm
Tell me I am loved
Give me hope
Let me cry
Make me feel
Give me touch
The window's broken bleeding screaming
Lying in the hall
I'm gone no one remembers me
A picture on the wall
"He was such a bright boy
The future in his hands:"
Or a spineless human pinball

Shot around by your demands
 Suicide suicide
 Goin' to sleep and when I die
 You'll look up and realize
 Then look down and wipe your eyes
 Then go back to your stupid lives
 Aw shit

Green Day

She (Dookie, 1994)

[Verse 1]
 She, she screams in silence
 A sullen riot penetrating through her mind
 Waiting for a sign
 To smash the silence with the brick of self-control

[Chorus]
 Are you locked up in a world that's been planned out for you?
 Are you feeling like a social tool without a use?
 Scream at me until my ears bleed
 I'm taking heed just for you

[Verse 2]
 She, she's figured out
 All her doubts were someone else's point of view
 Waking up this time
 To smash the silence with the brick of self-control

[Chorus]

Brat (Insomniac, 1995)

Mom and Dad don't look so hot these days
 They're getting over the hill
 Death is closing in and catching up
 As far as I can tell
 Got a plan of action and cold blood
 And it smells of defiance
 I'll just wait for Mom and Dad to die
 And got my inheritance

Well now I want more
 'Cause I'm getting bored
 And I'm going nowhere fast

I was once filled with doubt
 Now it's all figured out
 Nothing good can last

Crows feet and rot are setting in
 And time is running out
 My parent's income interest rate
 Is gaining higher clout
 I'm a snot nosed slob
 Without a job
 And I know I darn well should
 Mom and Dad don't look so hot these days
 But my future's looking good

Well now I want more
 'Cause I'm getting bored
 And I'm going nowhere fast
 I was once filled with doubt
 Now it's all figured out
 Nothing good can last

Jesus of Suburbia (American Idiot, 2004)

I'm the son of rage and love
 The Jesus of Suburbia
 The bible of none of the above
 On a steady diet of
 Soda Pop and Ritalin
 No one ever died for my
 Sins in hell
 As far as I can tell
 At least the ones that I got away with
 And there's nothing wrong with me
 This is how I'm supposed to be
 In a land of make believe
 That don't believe in me
 Get my television fix
 Sitting on my crucifix
 The living room in my private womb
 While the Moms and brats are away
 To fall in love and fall in debt
 To alcohol and cigarettes
 And Mary Jane
 To keep me insane
 Doing someone else's cocaine

And there's nothing wrong with me
 This is how I'm supposed to be
 In a land of make believe
 That don't believe in me
 At the center of the earth
 In the parking lot
 Of the 7-11 where I was taught
 The motto was just a lie
 It says home is where your heart is
 But what a shame
 Cause everyone's heart
 Doesn't beat the same
 It's beating out of time
 City of the dead
 At the end of another lost highway
 Signs misleading to nowhere
 City of the damned
 Lost children with dirty faces today
 No one really seems to care
 I read the graffiti
 In the bathroom stall
 Like the holy scriptures of a shopping mall
 And so it seemed to confess
 It didn't say much
 But it only confirmed that
 The center of the earth
 Is the end of the world
 And I could really care less
 City of the dead
 At the end of another lost highway
 Signs misleading to nowhere
 City of the damned
 Lost children with dirty faces today
 No one really seems to care
 I don't care if you don't
 I don't care if you don't
 I don't care if you don't care

Letterbomb (American Idiot, 2004)

Nobody likes you
 Everyone left you
 They're all out without you
 Having fun
 Where have all the bastards gone?
 The underbelly stacks up ten high

The dummy failed the crash test
 Collecting unemployment checks
 Like a flunkie along for the ride
 Where have all the riots gone?
 As your city's motto gets pulverized
 What's in love is now in debt
 On your birth certificate
 So strike the fucking match to light this fuse
 The town bishop is an extortionist
 And he don't even know that you exist
 Standing still when it's do or die
 You better run for your fucking life
 It's not over 'till you're underground
 It's not over before it's too late
 This city's burnin'
 It's not my burden
 It's not over before it's too late
 There's nothing left to analyze
 Where will all the martyrs go when the virus cures itself?
 And where will we all go when it's too late?
 And don't look back
 You're not the Jesus of Suburbia
 The St. Jimmy is a figment of
 Your father's rage and your mother's love
 Made me the idiot America
 It's not over 'till you're underground
 It's not over before it's too late
 This city's burnin'
 It's not my burden
 It's not over before it's too late
 She said, I can't take this place
 I'm leaving it behind
 Well she said, I can't take this town
 I'm leaving you tonight

Bikini Kill

Double Dare Ya (Bikini Kill EP, 1992)

We're Bikini Kill and we want revolution
 Girl-style now!!!

Hey girlfriend
 I got a proposition goes something like this:
 Dare ya to do what you want
 Dare ya to be who you will

Dare ya to cry right out loud
 "You get so emotional baby"

Double dare ya, double dare ya, double dare ya
 Girl fuckin friend yeah
 Double dare ya
 Double dare ya
 Double dare ya
 Girl

Don't you talk out of line
 Don't go speaking out of your turn
 Gotta listen to what the Man says
 Time to make his stomach burn
 Burn, burn, burn, burn

Double dare ya, double dare ya, double dare ya
 Girl fuckin friend yeah
 Double dare ya, double dare ya, double dare ya
 Girl

You're a big girl now
 You've got no reason not to fight
 You've got to know what they are
 Fore you can stand up for your rights
 Rights, rights?
 You do have rights

Double dare ya, double dare ya
 Double dare triple fuckin dare ya girlfriend
 Double dare ya, double dare ya, double dare ya
 Girl

Rebel Girl (Yeah Yeah Yeah Yeah EP, 1993)

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood
 She's got the hottest trike in town
 That girl, she holds her head up so high
 I think I wanna be her best friend, yeah

Rebel girl, rebel girl
 Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
 Rebel girl, rebel girl
 I think I wanna take you home
 I wanna try on your clothes, uh

When she talks, I hear the revolution
 In her hips, there's revolution
 When she walks, the revolution's coming
 In her kiss, I taste the revolution

Rebel girl, rebel girl
 Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
 Rebel girl, rebel girl
 I know I wanna take you home
 I wanna try on your clothes, uh

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood
 I got news for you, she is!
 They say she's a slut, but I know
 She is my best friend, yeah

Rebel girl, rebel girl
 Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
 Rebel girl, rebel girl
 I know I wanna take you home
 I wanna try on your clothes

Love you like a sister always
 Soul sister, rebel girl
 Come and be my best friend
 Will you, rebel girl?
 I really like you
 I really wanna be your best friend
 Be my rebel girl

Downtown Boys

Somos Chulas (No Somos Pendejas) (Cost of Living, 2017)

Yo vuelo con mi head
 Yo vuelo con mis veins
 Yo vuelo con mi tongue
 Yo vuelo con mis fingers

Soy la misma
 Soy la misma
 Pero llevo otra corona

Soy la misma
 Soy la misma
 Y yo no soy tu madona

Dame la opción
 Porque somos chulas
 No somos pendejas
 Tengo la instrucción
 Cuando encontré, me enojo

Dame la opción
 Porque somos chulas
 No somos pendejas
 Somos chulas
 No somos pendejas
 Somos chulas
 No somos pendejas
 Somos chulas
 No somos pendejas
 Somos chulas
 No somos pendejas

Cuando lo saben, cuando
 Tienen cómodo?
 No tiene, no cómodo
 Y cuando lo saben, cuando
 Se sacan?
 No saca no

Yo no seguro money
 Yo no seguro land
 Yo no seguro ticket

It Can't Wait (Cost of Living, 2017)

Well, it shocks you
 It terrifies me
 Get outta my city
 Don't you have somewhere to be?

You're worried I'll treat you like you treat me
 You're worried I'll treat you like you treat me
 Worried I'll treat you like you treat me
 Worried I'll treat you like you treat me

New, no
 Gotta get it out, gotta let it out, let it
 New, no

It can't wait, it can't wait
It can't wait, it can't wait
It can't wait, it can't wait

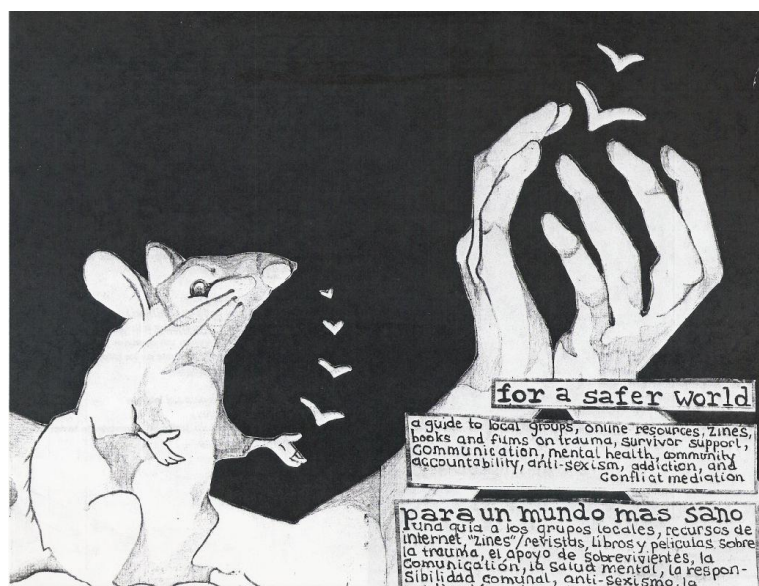
Joke's on you
'Cause you're here too
I don't gotta look
'Cause it finds me

What will they say when they know about it?
What will they say when they know about it?
What will they say when they know about it?
What will they say when they know about it?

New, no
Gotta get it out, gotta let it out, let it
New, no
It can't wait, it can't wait
It can't wait
New, no
Gotta get it out, gotta let it out, let it
New, no
It can't wait, it can't wait
It won't wait
It's in space
It can't wait, it can't wait
It can't wait

Appendix ii:

Zine Covers



Artists



Poly Styrene (Photo Credit: Second Hand Songs).



Siouxsie Sioux (Photo Credit: Allmusic.com).



Siouxsie Sioux in Manchester 1977 (Photo Credit: Kevin Cummins/Getty Images <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/english-singer-songwriter-musician-and-producer-siouxsie-news-photo/1014271250>).



Siouxsie Sioux performing with Siouxsie and the Banshees, US, 1984 (Photo Credit: Ebet Roberts/Redferns www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/singer-siouxsie-siouxsie-performing-with-english-rock-group-news-photo/165840703).



The Runaways (Photo Posted By Bryan Thomas on July 14, 2016, Nightflight.com nightflight.com/out-of-bounds-siouxsie-the-banshees-memorable-cameo-in-a-mostly-forgotten-1986-action-thriller/).



Joan Jett and Lita Ford performing with the Runaways (Photo Credit: Jenny Lens www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/queens-of-noise-the-runaways).



Exene Cervenka (Photo Credit:
https://www.reddit.com/r/OldSchoolCool/comments/2l36u6/exene_cervenka_of_x_1980/).



Patti Smith (Photo Credit: Amazon).



SATE (Photo Credit: Toronto Music Review).



Downtown Boys (Photo Credit: DemocracyNow.org).

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